

Week 5

Cornelius (Acts 10:1-8; 19-24; 44-48)

Tonight, we're wrapping up a sermon series about little-known people in the Bible who made a huge impact in the Kingdom of God. But tonight, we're going to flip that around and see how a *well-known* guy (Peter) impacted a *little-known* guy named Cornelius.

And, in this passage, Cornelius teaches us three important truths about the Gospel...

1. Everyone needs the Gospel, regardless of their morality.

Acts 10:1–8 “At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, ² a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. ³ About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, “Cornelius.” ⁴ And he stared at him in terror and said, “What is it, Lord?” And [the angel] said to him, “Your prayers and your alms [generosity to others] have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵ And now send men to Joppa and bring ~~one~~ Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with [another man named] Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.” ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, ⁸ and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.”

Cornelius was a Roman centurion, which meant that he was in command of 100 soldiers called the Italian regiment (cohort). And verse 2 says he was a very religious man:

- **He was “a devout man who feared God.”** (he believed in God and lived a very moral and religious life).
- **He “gave alms generously to the people.”** (he generously gave his time and money to those in need).
- **He “prayed continually to God.”** (he prayed at the appointed prayer times throughout the day).

So, when you take a casual look at this man's life, you would think he's a follower of Christ. But, as we'll see in a moment, Cornelius was lost. He was very religious, but he had never been shown how to have a genuine relationship with Christ. Paul describes it this way...

Romans 10:2–3 “For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.”

This perfectly describes Cornelius: being very religious – “having a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge” of the true Gospel. But, as we're about to see, God is going to send Peter to Cornelius' house to tell him the Gospel so his entire family will have an opportunity to give their hearts to Christ.

You see, every person is lost apart from Christ – regardless of how wicked they are (prodigal son) or how religious they are (older brother)! So, God is going to send Peter to tell Cornelius how to be saved.



Why send Peter, who was 30 miles away in Joppa, when Philip the evangelist was already in Caesarea? (Acts 8:40).

Because God needed to teach Peter that salvation wasn't just for the Jews – it was also for Gentiles like Cornelius, which leads us to our second point...

2. Everyone needs the Gospel, regardless of their ethnicity.

For time's sake, we won't look at verses 9-16, but in those verses, God shows Peter in a vision that salvation is not just for a certain group or race of people. In fact, God shows him that there is only one race – *the human race!*

- Every person has the same Creator (Acts 17:26).
- Every person descends from one couple (Adam & Eve).
- Every person needs the same Savior (Acts 4:12).

God had to show this to Peter so he would be willing to share the gospel with a Gentile like Cornelius and his family...

Acts 10:19–24 “And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit

said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." ²¹ And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" ²² And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." ²³ So he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. ²⁴ And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends."

When Peter arrived, Cornelius had gathered his friends and relatives so they could also hear the truth about Jesus.

Illustration: My first mission trip to Brazil (show pic). One person said, "Will you please come back this afternoon when my entire family can hear what you have to say?" When we went back, their whole family was there waiting.

Cornelius and his family were not asking for a lecture on the Jewish religion. They were lost sinners wanting to know how to be saved. Like Nicodemus (John 3), he knew that his religious devotion wasn't enough and it left him empty. You see, a lot of religious people have a...

- **Distorted view of their sin** (My sin is not that bad – look how moral and religious I am).
- **Distorted view of God's grace** (God will accept me the way I am)

But Cornelius humbled himself when God revealed his need for salvation, which leads us to our final point...

3. Everyone needs the Gospel, regardless of their location.

You see, wherever there is a heart searching for the truth, God will see to it that the gospel reaches them. For example, we see this in the lives of Cornelius *and* the Ethiopian Eunuch...

- **The Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40)** – was reading Isaiah 53 and asking God to show him what it meant – God sent Philip to share the gospel.

- **When Cornelius** was trying to find something more than empty religion – God sent Peter to share the gospel with him.

You see, these men show us two *very* important principles that theologians call “general revelation” (God revealing Himself generally to everyone) and “specific revelation” (God revealing Himself specifically through Jesus)...

- **God gives “General Revelation” to everyone.**

➤ **Through the Creation Around Us.**

Romans 1:18-20 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”

➤ **Through the Conscience Within Us.**

Romans 2:14–15 “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, ~~they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.~~¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, ~~and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.~~”

Human beings instinctively know the difference between good and evil – right and wrong – because God (the Law-Giver) has put it there. And we instinctively know within our conscience that we will ultimately be held responsible for our behavior.

So, the creation around us allows us to *see* God’s existence, and the conscience within us allows us to *sense* God’s existence. But many people “suppress” that evidence and deny God’s existence (Rom. 1:18). And when you keep suppressing the evidence of God’s existence, Paul said

you become futile in your thinking, your heart is darkened, and you ultimately become a fool (Ps. 14:1).

But, if you respond accurately to general revelation, Go

- **God gives “Specific Revelation” to those who accurately respond.**

~~When a person responds humbly/accurately to *general* revelation, God will send them *specific* revelation—someone to share with them the truth about Jesus (Acts 4:12, John 14:6).~~

Wherever there is a searching sinner, God will make sure they hear about the seeking Savior. This is why it's *vital* for us to share the gospel locally, nationally, and internationally. Your witness for Christ could be exactly what somebody is praying for right now!¹

And this answers the age-old question:



How could a good God send someone to hell if they never had a chance to hear about Jesus?

There is no such thing. WHEREVER there is a sinner who responds humbly/accurately to general revelation, God will send them specific revelation so they can be saved.

And this is what happens to Cornelius and his family...

Acts 10:44; 47-48 “While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word...⁴⁷ [And Peter said] “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.”

This entire experience is a picture of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20). Peter went where God sent him. He made disciples. He baptized them. And he taught them the Word (*remained for some days*). That same Great Commission applies to us today. Are we fulfilling it like we should?

Small Groups

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 446). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.