

Acts 10

Acts 10
Tape #8099
Pastor Chuck Smith

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, In the Bible we are introduced to different centurions. They all of them seem to be of high character. A centurion was over a hundred soldiers in the Roman army. You remember there was a centurion in Capernaum who had a servant who was very sick(Matthew 8:5-13). The people came and said to Jesus, this fellow has helped us build our synagogue. He is a good man. He is worthy. So Jesus said I will come and heal his servant. So as Jesus was on the way to the house to heal the servant, word came to the centurion that Jesus was coming to his house. His wife probably said, honey, the house is a mess, the servant is sick. He hasn't been able to clean the place. We can't have the Lord coming here! Look, all the mess here and all. So he sent other messengers back. Don't bother coming. I understand authority. I am a man under authority. I have under me men. I can say to one, go and he goes and to another come, and he comes. I know that all You have to do is to speak the word and my servant will be healed. It's not necessary that You come to the house. Just speak the word. Jesus commended him. He said I haven't found this kind of faith in all of Israel. From among the Israelites He had not seen such faith as was manifested by this Roman centurion.

When Jesus was crucified, it was a centurion, standing near the cross(Matthew 27:54). When he saw the events of the crucifixion, he said surely this was the Son of God!

Now we have Cornelius, another centurion. He is in Caesarea, which was the Roman capital of that area. The Roman magistrates ruled from Caesarea. We are told in verse two, that he was 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.* He was a man of prayer. Very commendable. He lived a good life. He was seeking God. He feared God. He prayed. He gave alms to the people. Now here's a second case in the Book of Acts, where we find a person who is outside of the covenant nation, who is devout and seeking God. We remember earlier we were introduced to the Ethiopian eunuch who was the treasurer of Ethiopia, under Candace the queen, who had come to Jerusalem to worship God and was returning back to Ethiopia. We remember how that God sent Philip all the way down by direct revelation to this area in the Gaza strip to meet the man in order that he might introduce him to the understanding of Jesus Christ from the scriptures. So a man searching for God and God by divine direction sent someone to him so that his search for God could be fulfilled, so he could find God. Now here is another man. He is a Roman. He is a centurion, and yet he is searching for God. He is praying. He is probably has been introduced to Judaism to the idea of one God. He had come from the pagan roots of Romanism or from Rome with all of its many gods and to the belief to the one God. He is praying and he is helping the poor. And he is a devout man. And again God by divine intervention and by divine revelation is going to meet this thirsty soul by sending, by divine revelation, someone to share with him the way of God more completely so that he can come into a full understanding and relationship with God.

So he saw in a vision, 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."* So God is going to meet this man whose hunger is for God, with a fuller revelation. Notice how the angel specifically instructs him on just where Peter is and gives him implicit instructions of how he might come to a fuller, richer, revelation and understanding of God.

So 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.* It's about a thirty mile journey, twenty five to thirty miles between

Caesarea and Joppa. And so two of his servants and one of his soldiers to accompany him, were sent to Joppa.

Now on ⁹*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.* It's interesting to me how that God always works on both ends. It wasn't just, you know, God working in the heart of Cornelius in instructing him. But now on the other end, God is going to work in the heart of Peter. So God working on both ends brings His purposes to pass. Pastor Chuck has had many people come to him and declare that God has spoken to them for him. And they have a message from the Lord for him. Now, he has found that quite often God has already been working in his own heart on that issue. So that God was working on both ends and as they come it is a confirmation to him of those things that God has been speaking to his heart. Other times there are off the wall kind of things. He passes these off because he does believe that when God is dealing with you, He works on both ends. If someone just comes and says we have a vision and you are supposed to come down to Tiajuana and start a ministry there, I would hesitate unless the Lord, you know, had given me a great desire for tamales and enchiladas, you know, and had shown me a vision of ministry among the Mexicans or something. So it's something that God works on both ends. He'll work in your heart and oftentimes then the work is confirmed by someone coming and sharing with you.

So Peter had gone up about lunch time to pray. The sixth hour is noon. ¹⁰*Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; (and he would have eaten) but while they made ready, (preparing the food) 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!* In the Greek it is really a little bit stronger than, Not so! I'll have none of it, literally! So that's sort of interesting. I'll have none of it, Lord. The Lord had given him a commandment. Rise Peter, kill and eat. I'll have none of it, Lord! See, that really isn't consistent, is it? It's sort of the inconsistencies, I think, that often times we have when we argue with the Lord or when we are fighting against what the Lord is saying to us.

Now the voice spoke to him the second time. The first time the voice said to him, Peter, kill and eat and he refused saying, *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." (or uncleansed)* ¹⁶*This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.* Now as far as a Jew was concerned, the Gentile nations were unclean. In a person with a strong Jewish background, with strong Jewish roots, it is extremely difficult to arise over the hold that tradition has on you. Traditions many times are stronger than doctrine. And we hold to the traditions even when they are not doctrinally sound. Peter, growing up in the Jewish tradition, looked upon the Gentiles as unclean. And the Lord is going to bring into Peter a very radical and dramatic change! The realization that God will save Gentiles! The Jews did not believe that a Gentile could be saved. They believed that the only hope for a Gentile, as far as salvation was concerned, was to become a Jew. They had to proselytize into the Jewish faith in order to be saved. And this was the feeling of the early church. It was their feeling that a Gentile could not be saved. He would have to become a Jew in order to be saved. Now the Lord is trying to break Peter from this tradition. It should be noted that though he began to break him down, Peter still had problems with this later on. Later on in the Gentile church of Antioch, where Paul was ministering, Peter came up to visit the church. And he ate with the Gentiles until there were certain of the church from Jerusalem, who came on up. Then he separated himself and wouldn't eat with the Gentiles. And it caused a division in the church of Antioch. So that Paul rebuked Peter to the face because of his creating this division because even Barnabas was carried away with the division that took place there in Antioch when Peter separated himself and would only eat with the Jews and not with the Gentiles. So it's a difficult thing to overcome. A deep seated traditional background. And with Peter it took a direct work of God's Holy Spirit to deal with him on this issue. And so it took three times this vision that he saw. Do you suppose that three times, that he said, not so Lord? And the Lord had to say to him, don't call that unclean which I've cleansed.

¹⁷Now while Peter wondered within himself (or was perplexed) 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. They had arrived in Joppa. They inquired around. Where does Simon live? So they were directed and they had now arrived at the gate at Simon's house. ¹⁸And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. ¹⁹While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. Now Peter didn't know what this was all about. What does this mean? So the Lord now is going to clarify the vision to him. And the Lord will speak as directly to Peter as He did to Cornelius, concerning the things that are happening. So the Lord said unto him, there are three men who are seeking you. ²⁰Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them." Now Peter still doesn't know what is going on. He knows he's had a strange vision. He knows that the Lord has sort of rebuked him. The Lord has told him that He has cleansed things that Peter isn't ready to accept as being clean. And so the command to just arise and don't doubt, I've sent them.

²¹Then 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?" ²²And 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." So Peter now is beginning to understand. Cornelius, the centurion, is not a Jew. But God has spoken to him. He is favorable towards the Jewish people. He is a devout man. God is speaking to him. ²³Then he invited them in and lodged them. Now, prejudices are beginning to break down. It was an unthinkable thing to invite a Gentile in to your home. Every place that he would sit down would be considered unclean. If you would sit down where he had sat in a chair, then you would be unclean. They felt that this ceremonial uncleanness could be transmitted by touching or by touching something that a Gentile had touched. So to invite them in to spend the night was the beginning of the breakdown of the prejudice.

On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him. Now these men that went with him were Jews. I think that Peter suspicioned God was going to do something and I want witnesses. And so he took six men with him from the church in Joppa so that if God should happen to do something among the Gentiles, he would have people who could back up his story. Because when we get into the next chapter, we find that Peter was called on the carpet for going to the Gentiles. They heard in Jerusalem that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit and all. When Peter came back to Jerusalem, they began to contend with him. They said, you went to the Gentiles. So Peter had to tell them the story of how it was that he went. But they were calling him on the carpet for going to the Gentiles. This feeling was very strong. It's hard for us to imagine the racial prejudice that did exist in their hearts and in their minds.

²⁴And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him. That, "worshipped him" doesn't mean that he is actually worshipping Peter. But he bowed down in the Oriental custom of bowing and doing obeisance. ²⁶But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man." Refusing to receive the adulation or the worship of this man. Herein is a real problem. When a person has been used of God, a person has been gifted by the Holy Spirit, and has been an instrument through which God has brought help, blessing, sometimes healing to a person, it is very common for people to begin to hold that person in high regard. To sort of elevate them in their minds above others. Thinking that they are closer to God. Thinking that they have some special inroads to God. They sort of hold them in reverence and adulation. In fact sometimes they even start calling them reverend or they start calling them the most reverend or the most right, reverend. They start adding titles to the titles as they are elevating that individual. Now the danger is when the individual begins to receive the adulation and tries to stand on the pedestal that they are building for him. Peter was always careful, as were the apostles, as not to allow people to hold them up on a pedestal, elevate them and exalt them above the others. Peter didn't say, kiss my ring, man. If he were the first pope. But he said stand up, I'm just a man. ²⁷And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. I'm certain as Peter walked in the door, it was

probably the most difficult step he had ever taken. He had never been in the house of a Gentile in his life. It was strictly forbidden by their interpretation of the law to enter the house of a Gentile. Yet in the back of his mind, he could see the sheet. He could see all of these animals. And he could hear the Lord saying, don't call that unclean which I have cleansed. So against all of the prejudice, traditional, he stepped over the threshold into the house. And there were many that had come together. It was a great gathering of people there in the house of Cornelius.

²⁸Then 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.

²⁹Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?"

³⁰So 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, ³¹and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. God heard his prayers. God was cognizant of this man's generosity. His concern and care for the poor. So this man in bright clothing said, ³²Send 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.' ³³So 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." We're here to hear God's word. We were told to send. We did it. It's good that you have come. We've gathered together. We want to hear God's word!

³⁴Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. Now God had declared that way back in Deuteronomy(Deuteronomy 10:17). It was a reoccurring theme. God had declared that He was no respecter of persons. It was something that was spoken of in the Psalms(Psalms 82:2). And of course it's a theme that Paul picks up many times in the New Testament because Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles.

So Peter is saying, I perceive that God shows no partiality. ³⁵But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. In other words he is understanding that you don't have to be a Jew to be a Christian. God will accept a Gentile who seeks Him. He is not saying that you can be apart from Jesus Christ. You see here was a man who was sincerely seeking God, so God made provisions for this man to hear the gospel that he might be saved. God accepted his prayer. God acknowledged his heart. And God sent His word that he might have the revelation of Jesus Christ in order that he might be saved. It's not saying that you can be saved apart from the revelation of Jesus Christ, but it is acknowledging that God will judge a man according to the light and the understanding that that man has. Living up to that understanding.

In Luke chapter 12:42-48, Jesus gives that story of the lord who went away into a far country leaving his goods in charge with a steward who when the lord did not return after a prolonged period of time said, well, my lord delays his coming. He began to abuse his position. He began to be drunken and abuse those who were under his authority. So that the lord came in an hour that he was not expecting. He took from him his position, his authority. He commanded that he be given over to punishment. Then the lord said for he who knew the will of the lord and did not do according to the will of the lord, will be beaten with many stripes. Yet he who did things that were worthy of many stripes, because he did not know, will be beaten with few. Unto whom much is given, much is required.

So there is always that issue, well what about that person who has never heard about Jesus Christ? The Lord will not be unfair when He judges. He will be righteous when He judges. And a person will be judged according to the light and the understanding that they have been given. That can be positive and that can be negative. If you have heard and you reject, then greater punishment than those who did things worse that you did, but yet they didn't know.

And so I perceive that God is no respecter of persons in every nation those that fear Him and work righteousness will be accepted with Him. ³⁶The word which God sent to the children of Israel, (The message of God of salvation came to the nation of Israel through Jesus Christ. Peace with God is possible through Jesus Christ. This message that was sent to Israel) *preaching peace through Jesus Christ--* Basically, that is the peace with God that man can have through Jesus Christ. And peace with fellow man as

Paul points out in Ephesians, chapter two (Ephesians 2:14), Jesus has broken down the walls and the barriers that existed between national and ethnic groups. That as we stand before God we all stand on the same level. God is no respecter of persons. Paul points out in his letter to the Romans that we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. He said there is no difference. There is no difference between a Jew and a Gentile. We've all sinned and come short of the glory of God, nor is there any difference in the method by which we are saved, it is through faith in Jesus Christ! We are all on the same level when we stand before God. He is no respecter of person. So God sent the message to Israel, the message of peace by Jesus Christ.

For --He is Lord of all-- ³⁷that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: As Paul was later talking to King Agrippa. He said Agrippa, you know these things. They weren't done in a corner. In other words, Jesus wasn't something or someone that nobody knew about. His ministry was so spectacular everybody knew about it. They were all talking about it. It wasn't done in a corner. People all over had heard about Jesus Christ and the miracles that he did. It was a well known fact. He didn't just minister in some little corner area in secret. And so that word was published throughout Judea by word of mouth, it was published around. It began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached. The ministry of Jesus, ³⁸how 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. So he speaks of the ministry of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, God was with Him. Peter says ³⁹And 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. ⁴⁰Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, So again the message of the resurrection. That's the message of the gospel, identifying Jesus of Nazareth. He went about doing good, filled with the Holy Spirit. Healing, delivering, God was with Him. In Jerusalem He was slain. He was hung on a tree, but God raised Him from the dead on the third day. That's the message. We were witnesses. God raised Him and He showed Him openly ⁴¹not 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. You remember Jesus ate with them on different occasions. He said, you know, you believe I'm a ghost but I'll eat. And He ate with them on different occasions. So Peter is testifying. We were witnesses. We saw Him openly.

Remember in the fourteenth chapter of John (John 14:19), Jesus said, "A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also." And one of the disciples, Judas not Iscariot, said how is it Lord that You will manifest Yourself to us and not to the world? And Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him." So after His resurrection He did manifest Himself to those who believed. His disciples, He showed Himself openly. Those whom He had chosen before, foreordained even to us.

⁴²And 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. (Judge overall.) ⁴³To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins." All of the prophets spoke of the coming of the Messiah. They all spoke of those who shall believe in Him would receive the remission of their sin.

Now at this point Peter's message was interrupted. Interrupted by the Holy Spirit. ⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. There was sort of a second Pentecost of sorts. While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit just fell upon them who were listening. ⁴⁵And those of the circumcision (the Jews) who believed were astonished, (I can't believe it. These people are Gentiles! God has given them the gift of the Holy Spirit. It can't be! They were astonished!) as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. Now in the second chapter when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, the hundred and twenty who were waiting, as the multitudes gathered on that day wondering what was going on. They were amazed. Peter preached the message of the resurrection to them. They were convicted and they said men and brethren what shall we do since we have crucified the Lord of Glory? And Peter said repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, the remission of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit for this promise is to you and to your children and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call. Now Peter

had told them that on the day of Pentecost when he was talking to the Jews. I don't think that he really realized that he was saying that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are going to be for all people! The Gentiles, too! But as many as the Lord our God will call. He was not really realizing at that point that God would be calling a multitude of Gentiles to the faith in Jesus Christ. Though it was prophesied in the scriptures by the prophets of the Gentiles receiving the glorious gospel. So those that have come with Peter are shocked because God has given to the Gentiles the gift of the Holy Spirit!

*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. They begged him to stay for awhile. So here is the beginning of the Gentile church. God pouring out His Spirit and now calling out from among the Gentiles, a bride for Jesus Christ. The Gentile bride of Jesus Christ. And so a beautiful, beautiful picture of the beginning of God's work among the Gentiles of which we here today can give thanks to God because of the door being opened to the Gentiles. We are blessed because of what God has done in that He is no respecter of persons. He receives each one of us on an equal footing. He doesn't close the door to any man. And thus we are wrong if we feel one race is above or superior to another. It is absolutely wrong for us to think that one man because of his nationality or because of his ethnic background is less than we are. There is that tendency to promote a person's ethnic background and the characteristics of it. So many ethnic groups feel that they are superior to other ethnic groups because of certain characteristics or traits or whatever and we as Americans and unfortunately many of the Anglo-Saxon Americans feel that they are superior. Not so! God is no respecter of persons. No matter who the man is. No matter where he is from, if he will call upon God, he can be saved! And so it is a thrill to go into the jungles of New Guinea and see those people who still in a primitive culture. To go into their huts and to sit there in their huts and worship God and pray together with them. And their simple faith. Some of the greatest blessings have come in just listening to them as they talk of God in that simple faith. Pastor Chuck felt as he was there that these people are miles of ahead of him in their understanding and in their relationship with God. The way they relate and the way they talk about God in such a simple, beautiful way. God is no respecter of persons. Standing before God, we all stand on the same level.

Father, we thank You for the power of Your Holy Spirit and the gift of Your Holy Spirit that You've poured out upon the Gentiles as well as the Jews. And Lord we thank You that You have opened the door that we can come in and know the blessedness of our sins forgiven and the blessedness of fellowshiping with You. Oh Lord, we come today and we ask, Lord, that You would work in our hearts and in our lives as we read, Lord, of how You directed Peter so specifically and how you directed Cornelius. Lord, we long to be in that place of close fellowship with You. To the extent, Lord, that You could speak directly to us about specific issues. Lord, let our hearts be open to the fullness of Your Holy Spirit and to the work of Your Holy Spirit, that we might be empowered by Your Spirit to do Your work. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.