

CORNELIUS – The Gentile Hero

Reading: Acts 10

This story illustrates the fact that God can multi-task in ways we can hardly imagine or believe. It concerns Jewish-Gentile relationships. Christianity's 'cradle' was Judaism. Jesus was a Jew, His ministry was to the Jews, His disciples were assorted Jews. Yet Jesus instructed His disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all nations.

Within a relatively short time, this is what happened, and the universal church was born. Cornelius was the man at the heart of this change of view. (Note how often in the Epistles the conflicts were with the Judaizers who did not wish to change their practices and wanted the non-Jews to become, in effect, Jews. It was Cornelius a Roman and his household, who opened the doors of the church to a Gentile world. Also note that Peter was involved, as he was in opening the church to Jews in Acts 2 and the Samaritans in Acts 8.)

What does the Bible tell us about Cornelius?

Cornelius was the commander of the Italian Regiment of the Roman military. He was a centurion. He was based in Caesarea. Despite the fact he was a Roman he was a God worshipper, sympathetic to Judaism and much respected by the Jewish community. Acts 10 v2 indicates he regularly prayed and gave to charity.

Whilst praying, Cornelius had a vision in which his prayer life is recognized (Acts 10 v30-31) and he receives instruction to summon Peter who happens to be in nearby Joppa – God's timing! Note that Peter is staying at the house of a 'Tanner', something alien for strict Jews. Two of Cornelius' servants and a devout soldier are dispatched to find Peter and bring him to Caesarea.

Simultaneously Peter is also receiving God's communication through a vision. This vision contains an instruction that means a life change for Peter and his Jewish upbringing. For, in his vision, he sees a broad range of animals both 'clean' and 'unclean' (Acts 10 v11-12). Peter is told to 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat' (verse 13).

Peter resists and repeats several times that he has always eaten kosher food (as instructed in the Old Testament). God's voice clearly states 'do not call unclean what God has made clean' (v15). A further instruction is given to Peter as he is then told that he should go with the people at the door. This he does after he is told of Cornelius' vision.

On arrival and entering the house of Cornelius, the two men meet and greet. Peter is still wrestling with the challenge of having social intercourse with Gentiles. (Sometimes we have to wrestle with challenges we face in the Lord's work.) The outcome is that both men realise that God has brought them together. The penny has dropped! (v34-35). Peter realises that God has no favourites but welcomes anyone who fears God and does what is right. (How is that for an anti-racist policy!) This is one of the most momentous events in history! Peter preaches and God's Spirit can be seen and experienced and the universal church has begun!

What does the example of Cornelius teach us today?

- God is in control and His will, will be done (cf. The Lord's Prayer)
- Being religious is not enough to save a person. Cornelius was very devout yet still needed to hear the 'gospel' from Peter.
- It was only after believing that the household received God's Spirit.
- We need to share the good news of Jesus with others and learn that God loves everyone. No one is more superior than others.

- In sharing the gospel with others, we are not only fulfilling the instruction of Jesus in Matthew 28 v19, but we will be amazed how God directs our daily lives. It may be helpful to have a daily prayer 'Lord, may I meet today those you want me to meet or contact. Please give me the words to say.'
- Never underestimate God's love for those around us and the role each one of us can play in extending God's kingdom.

Prayer: Father God

Thank you for people who have broken the mould and shared your love with others. We only know You because You have used these men and women to share the gospel in so many different ways.

Please help me to have the mind of Christ as I seek to share the gospel with others.

Amen