

Introduction: From time-to-time we need to be reminded that God is always acting in everyone's life, whether a person realizes this – or not. When God sent the ten plagues on Egypt, He was acting on the pharaoh to reveal to the king of Egypt that his heart was hard. But, the king of Egypt refused to repent and hardened his heart to the point of no return and then God sealed pharaoh's condemnation. *** But, we can be grateful that God gives us examples in His Word as positive as pharaoh is negative. Consider Saul of Tarsus. He was a devout and God-fearing Pharisee from Benjamin, son of Israel. He sought to live out God's instructive teaching with all his heart. Only problem was: he misunderstood Jesus and His Mission. But God had other plans for Saul and miraculously converted him as he was headed to Damascus to persecute hundreds of Jesus' disciples. *** The key person in today's Bible story is in many ways the opposite of Paul. Cornelius was a successful soldier from Italy, commanding one hundred soldiers in the Roman army. And, he had heard about The God of Israel and he feared Him to the point of giving generously to God's people and praying in faith through all circumstances. He had not yet converted by surrendering all he was and all he had to Israel's God. But God is clearly working in his life. *** Then Cornelius received the greatest miracle from God. And, the apostle Peter was given an eye-opening lesson through a miraculous vision so his heart was opened to all people. When the two men met, Peter preached a ten point sermon that resulted in Cornelius and his household being filled with faith and with The Holy Spirit *** Let's see how this amazing true story reflects the compassionate heart of Jesus for lost sheep; and, what happens when laborers go into God's harvest field.

I. Through visions God brings together a God-fearing Roman centurion and the apostle Peter. (*Acts 10:1-8*)

A. A centurion named Cornelius was a devout and God-fearing man, giving generously to the people and praying to God. (*Verses 1-2*)

1. There was a certain man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian cohort. (*Verse 1*)

Cornelius: His name means horn, indicating his parents wanted him to be a man of strength, in our vernacular: 'ram tough'. He was stationed in Caesarea in western Samaria on the Sea some twenty miles north of Joppa.

Centurion: He was a commander with one hundred Roman soldiers under him.

2. He was devout and God-fearing with all his household, doing generous giving to the people and praying to The God through all. (*Verse 2*)

Devout and God-fearing: He was pious, respecting The God, and fearing Him in faith. And he was a positive influence on his family and all who were under him.

Generous giver: The word describing him comes into English: *eleemosynary*. Every year I was a corporate officer I had to sign a paper disclosing *eleemosynary* activities. He gave to 'the people': Israel.

Prays through everything: In good times and bad times, he prayed with thanksgiving as he petitioned God in faith.

B. At the afternoon prayer hour, he had a vision of an angel who told him his prayers and giving have come up before God and he must send for Simon Peter. (*Verses 3-6*)

1. He saw a vision plainly near the ninth hour of the day, an angel of The God having come to him and having said to him: Cornelius! (*Verse 3*)

Clear vision: The vision he saw was clear and vivid.

Mid-afternoon: Near the equator the ninth hour of daylight is 3:00 PM.

Messenger: God often sends His angels to people as His messengers.

2. Cornelius, having stared at him and having been afraid, said: What is it Lord? (*Verses 4a-b*)

Fear and question: This unexpected supernatural visit caused him to stare in wonder with fear. He addressed the angel as God's representative.

3. He answered to him: Thy prayers and thy generous gifts have come up as a memorial offering before The God. (*Verses 4c-d*)

Prayer and giving: The angel reverses the order of Cornelius' works of faith, calling them a memorial offering, associated with the grain offering in Israel (*Leviticus 2*). May we realize the ability to give generously and pray in all circumstances is a gift of grace to those with humble, reverential fear of God.

4. Now, thou must send men to Joppa and thou must bring back Simon who is called Peter. (*Verse 5*)

Send to Joppa for Simon-Peter: Joppa means beautiful. Simon Peter means hearing rock in Hebrew and Greek respectively.

5. He is staying with Simon the tanner whose house is by the Sea. (*Verse 6*)

Tanner: This Simon's vocation made him continually ceremonially unclean, as he was always touching bodies of dead animals.

C. Cornelius calls three attendants, tells them what happened and sends them to Joppa. (*Verses 7-8*)

1. When having gone, the angel speaking to him; having called two of his servants and a pious soldier; and, having told to them everything ... (*Verses 7-8a*)

Three preliminaries: Before obeying God's commands: Cornelius saw God's messenger had gone, then he called three attendants of his household and told them all about his vision.

2. ... he sent them to Joppa. (*Verse 8b*)

Sends to Joppa: Luke leaves it unsaid that they were to bring Peter back to Caesarea.

II. At noon the next day God prepares Peter with a vision of unclean animals and sends him to Cornelius where he preaches a sermon to non-Jews. (*Acts 10:9-17, 34-38; Matthew 9:36-37*)

A. As Cornelius' men travel, Peter prays on an empty stomach at noon and receives a twice-repeated vision to eat unclean animals, and hears, 'What God has cleansed, thou must not call common'. (*Acts 10:9-16*)

1. The next day, these journeying and drawing near the city, Peter went up to the roof to pray about the sixth hour. (*Verse 9*)

Next day Peter prays: As Cornelius' party approaches Joppa, Peter begins to pray on the roof at noon.

2. But, he became hungry and was desiring to eat; and, as the meal was being prepared, a trance came upon him. (*Verse 10*)

Hungry: His hunger grew into a continually distracting desire.

Trance: But, God overrides his distracting desire by putting him into an 'ecstatic' trance.

3. He is seeing heaven having been opened and is coming down a vessel like a large cloth, four corners being lowered upon the earth; in it was being contained all four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. (*Verses 11-12*)
Cloth from heaven: Peter sees heaven opened and staying open and something like a large (mega) sheet being lowered to the ground.
Many creatures: The animals were both 'clean' and 'unclean according to God's instructions He had given to Moses.
4. And it was a voice to him, 'Having gone Peter, thou must kill and thou must eat'. (*Verse 13*)
Voice: The voice is God, The Father of The One Peter had followed for over three years.
5. And Peter spoke, 'By no means, Lord! Because never I have eaten anything common or unclean'. (*Verse 14*)
Peter: Being a good Jew who is following Jesus, Peter replies to God's command with: No way Lord!
6. And again the voice a second time to him, 'That which The God has made clean, thou must not call common.' (*Verse 15*)
Voice: With His second word to Peter, God makes it clear He can make anything that is unclean and common to be clean. Peter is about to learn an important new truth:

God can cleanse people of every nation

7. This happened three times, and immediately the vessel was taken back into heaven. (*Verse 16*)
Three times: When God does something three times it is absolutely certain. When His people were in Egypt God gave two dreams about the same future event to pharaoh. Joseph told him that because God repeated the dream twice, it was established by God and it would be done quickly (*Genesis 41:32*). Peter will find the triply given vision fulfilled in minutes, and come to know:

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As Peter was continuing to wonder what the vision may be, Behold! The men sent by Cornelius, having found by inquiry Simon's house, stopped at the gate (*Acts 10:17*) Then Peter goes with them to Cornelius' household and, after introductions, begins to preach (*Acts 10:18-33*.)

- B. Peter begins his sermon with his new understanding that God accepts people in each nation who trust and obey Him, then he reminds these non-Jews of all Jesus did in His public ministry. (*Acts 10:34-38*)
 1. Peter, having opened his mouth spoke, 'By truth I am understanding God is not one who shows favoritism. (*Verse 34*)
NO favorites: Peter begins to apply the new lesson he is learning: namely God can cleanse people of all nations who turn to him, even Italian soldiers commanding one hundred men!
 2. But in each nation, the one fearing Him and doing what is right (is) acceptable to Him. (*Verse 35*)
Trust and obey: In other words, anyone from any nation with reverential faith in God demonstrated by obedience through God's indwelling Holy Spirit will be made acceptable to God by grace through faith.
 3. The Word which God sent to the sons of Israel telling good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all, you all know the matter having happened throughout the whole Judea. (*Verses 36-37a*)
You have come to know: The good news of Jesus was already spreading far and wide within two decades of Jesus' ascension to The Father.
 4. Having begun from Galilee; after the baptism John preached; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with The Holy Spirit and power; that He went around doing good and healing all those oppressed under the power of the devil; because God was with Him. (*Verse 37b-38*)
Beginning of sermon: Peter begins with five truths about Jesus' ministry on earth.
Remainder: After our passage, Peter fills in the five most important accomplishments of Jesus that completed His Mission: He was killed by crucifixion; He was raised to life; His disciples: preach about what He did; testify God appointed Him judge of the living and dead; and, whoever believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sin. (*Verses 39-43*)

Bottom line: Then The Holy Spirit fell on those hearing The Word, Cornelius' household (*verse 44*).

God can cleanse people of every nation

- C. When Jesus saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion that they were as sheep without a Shepherd, and tells His disciples of the lack of workers in the plenteous harvest. (*Matthew 9:36-37*)
 1. Jesus, having seen the multitudes, was moved with compassion on them because they were being troubled and scattered as sheep not having a shepherd. (*Verse 36*)
Compassion: Jesus has compassion for those who are needy.
Troubled: In addition they were being overwhelmed by life.
NO Shepherd: Jesus came as The Good Shepherd of sheep from Israel and also sheep from of the rest of humanity (*John 10*).
 2. Then He says to His disciples, 'Indeed, the harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few'. (*Verse 37*)
Laborers needed: There is a great need for workers in God's harvest field. All hands 'on deck'.
Pray: Therefore, you all must implore The Lord of the harvest to send out laborers in His harvest. (*Verse 38*)
And put 'legs' on our prayers.

In compassion Jesus asked for prayer for laborers

Conclusion: God can and will move in heaven and on earth so people of all nations may come to know Him and what Jesus accomplished on earth. Jesus was anointed in The Holy Spirit to heal those oppressed by the devil so they may be cleansed and forgiven by God with Him as their Shepherd.

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