

FRIDAY 15 July 2022 "An Angelic Visit?" (Acts 10:1-8)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

Do you find yourself having 'expectations' of people in certain positions of leadership or influence? *What have you observed when an influential person behaves in a way that is outside the expectations people have of them?* Today, let's look at a remarkable example of that.

In our continuing journey with the apostles in the months and years following Jesus' departure from earth back to heaven, as they were taking His story to the world, they encountered many different people, some of whom were people of high position and influence. Yesterday I left you in the seaside town of Joppa where Peter the apostle was staying in the home of Simon the 'tanner' after Peter had participated in two remarkable miracles. About 50 miles up the coastline from Joppa was an even more important harbor city, Caesarea. You may remember Philip ended up there in Acts 8:40 and Philip evidently settled there for the next at least 20 years of his life. He married and had a family there. But Philip does not appear in the story we find in Acts 10 which takes place in this great city, Caesarea.

The record says: ***"At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment."*** (Acts 10:1) ***"A centurion"*** means Cornelius had a regiment of at least 100 Roman soldiers under his command. ***"The Italian Regiment"*** was evidently a highly decorated military group assigned to this great city of Caesarea which was named in honor of the Caesar. For Caesar, this city was a major center of Roman Empire oversight for all of Palestine. We can presume Centurion Cornelius was an important man with very high expectations of his life and his leadership. The Caesar was worshipped in most parts of the Empire as a god. That would especially be true in places like Caesarea. *So that's why the next statement in Acts 10:2 is so radical: ***"Cornelius and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly."****

Often, I hear people with influential positions in business or health care or even politics or law enforcement say they find it very difficult meeting the public expectations of their professional role while also being a God honoring Christian. What do you think about that? Evidently *Cornelius had found a good balance and was highly respected both as a military commander faithful to the Caesar and a God honoring man of prayer with a tender heart of generosity toward the poor!*

The record says: ***"One day, at about 3pm, Cornelius had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said: 'Cornelius!' Cornelius stared at him in fear and replied, 'What is it, Lord?' The angel answered, 'Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send some men to Joppa, to bring back a man named Simon Peter."***

He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea. (Acts 10:3-6) Now I have no idea if Cornelius had ever before had a vision or a conversation with an angel, but this one is startling! *The angel addressed Cornelius by name!* That would frighten me, how about you? The angel told Cornelius God was very aware of his prayer life, his compassion and generosity toward the poor. *That tells me this angel, when in heaven, was in the very presence of God! And God had expressed to this angel that HE wanted Cornelius to know God was watching and aware of how he lived his life, not just meeting but exceeding the expectations of people both as a military officer and also a God-fearing man!* Finally, do you notice the angel was very specific in his instructions for Cornelius? Where to send men, who to look for and where to find him, and what to do with Peter the apostle when they find him! But do you notice something is missing in the instructions? *No explanation as to WHY?* Why should this Roman military officer send for one of the more high-profile apostles of Jesus? *What do you do my friends when you sense God is leading you to do something, but you don't know WHY?*

Look at what Centurion Cornelius did: ***"When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa."*** (Acts 10:7,8) Now don't rush past that my friends, without taking note of what the words tell us. Cornelius sent three men; *do you see their qualifications?* Two servants... that means employees who never ask "WHY" when given instructions by their master. They don't need to know why; they only need to do what their master has instructed them to do. And ***'a devout soldier'***. Now that strikes me. Common Roman soldiers have the reputation in history books as being generally uneducated, rough, perhaps brutal, with mindless obedience to their commanding officer. But do you see the word ***"devout"***? That tells me Cornelius had great influence on this one soldier in his Italian Regiment, and *like Cornelius this soldier was both faithful to his professional responsibilities as an 'attendant' of Cornelius, and passionate about his worship of Almighty God.*

Finally, did you notice Cornelius ***'told them everything that had happened...'***! Now let me ask you, my friends, if you had experienced this angelic visit, and you were a commanding officer, why not just call the men and send them on the mission to get Peter? *Why did Cornelius bother explaining WHY they were being sent and WHO had given Cornelius the instructions?* I think the answer is twofold. First it again confirms Cornelius' priority on being a devout man of God. An angelic visit was a significant spiritual experience... a messenger had come from heaven, from God's throne room, directly to Cornelius with a message from God specifically for him. *That's a big deal, and this devout soldier would have been greatly encouraged in his relationship with God by that!* Second, I presume Cornelius knew Jewish Apostle of Jesus, Simon Peter, would have some serious questions and hesitation when confronted by these three guys and told Commander Cornelius wanted to see Peter in Caesarea!

So off they went, as obedient servants and soldier. It would take them a long, full day to walk to Joppa from Caesarea, can you imagine what they talked about as they walked. So, let's just pause here.

Cornelius, I'm sure, spent much of the next two days mulling his angelic visit over and over in his mind, rethinking every word, analyzing it from every vantage point and always ending up in the same place... what will happen when Jewish Apostle Peter arrives at Roman Centurion Cornelius' carefully guarded house? I'm sure the **servants and soldier** are trying to make a plan for how to speak with Jewish Apostle Peter and convince him to come to Caesarea without having to arrest him and take him by force!? He'll have many questions, that's for sure, and how will they answer those questions. And then there's **Peter** in Joppa, spending his days teaching the Jesus followers in Joppa, and in the evenings praying and seeking to know from the Holy Spirit what is next for him!

And then finally, there's Jesus... watching all this from heaven. None of them know what Jesus has planned and how significant this meeting between Cornelius and Peter will be, both then and even now, 2000 years later! As Jesus is watching you and me, wherever you are around the world, and all that's going on in your life and mine..., *could it be God is planning something very significant? Will you and I be ready?*

I'll see you right back here tomorrow and we'll experience this amazing event together, my friends. Meanwhile, here's a special song to help us reflect on the potential of today...

Today's Scripture is Acts 10:1-8.