

MONDAY 18 July 2022 "Gentile's Saved?" (Acts 10:23-43)

Good Monday morning to you my 'Walking with Jesus' friends,

As you look at airports and roads these days, almost anywhere in the world, you'd think a huge percentage of the world's population is traveling, on the move to somewhere. *Isn't it true that when you travel, you have a fairly clear expectation of where you are going, when you'll arrive and what you'll experience when you get there?* But when was the last time you set out on a journey, traveling with someone else, and you didn't know for sure where you were going, or when you'd arrive, or what was awaiting you on the other end? *Let's join Peter today, on THAT type of journey!*

I left you yesterday with the apostle Peter, a tanner named Simon, two servants of a man named Cornelius, and a soldier who was an attendant of that Cornelius, a Centurion in the Italian Regiment stationed in Caesarea. Peter had been in the town of Joppa staying at the seaside home of Simon the tanner when suddenly he was visited by three men he did not know, saying they had come from a Roman centurion named Cornelius. They claimed Cornelius had sent them after he had an encounter with an angel who instructed him to do so. They told Peter Cornelius was waiting for him **"To come to his house so that he can hear what you have to say."** I can only imagine the conversation they had that night *as they tried to figure out what God had in mind bringing these five very different men together under one roof, in Joppa.*

The record says: **"The next day, Peter started out with them, and some of the Jesus followers from Joppa went along. The following day, they arrived in Caesarea."** (Acts 10:23) Caesarea was about 50 miles north from Joppa so that would have been further than they could walk in one day. Of course, there was no public transportation. What can you imagine these men talked about as they walked? What awaited them in Caesarea?

"Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. 'Stand up,' Peter said, 'I am only a man myself.'" (Acts 10:23-26) Well I'm sure that was not at all what Peter had expected! A Roman Centurion kneeling before Peter as he would kneel before the Caesar?

Peter knew himself well... he was only a simple fisherman from Galilee who had been called by Jesus from his fishing nets and invited to spend several months as part of the group of 12 disciples 'walking with Jesus'. Peter had grown very close to Jesus and been privileged to see and hear amazing things. Peter's life had been changed by Jesus, and now Peter and the others were sent by Jesus to take Jesus' story and message to the world. *But in Peter's mind, that world would be the Jewish world, not Gentiles like this Centurion. However, Peter had learned not to say NO to God! So, the record tells us Jewish Peter did something radical...*

"Peter went inside the house and found a large gathering of people. He said to them: 'You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or even visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So, when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask, why have you sent for me?" (Acts 10:27-29) I applaud Peter! He was bold, accurate and honest.

What he was doing, standing among Gentiles, was totally against everything he had learned from the time of his boyhood. However, since meeting Jesus, Peter had been on a steep learning curve, especially since that historic Passover/Easter weekend when Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead. Since the day of Pentecost, when Peter was anointed by the Holy Spirit flame of fire and empowered by the Spirit's filling, Peter had been living an adventure he would never have imagined! The healing of a cripple in Jerusalem and then standing in judgment before the Sanhedrin! Being warned not to speak of Jesus anymore and then arrested again and when an angel freed him and the other apostles, re-arrested and flogged for their refusal to stop telling the people about Jesus! Then miracles in Lydda and Joppa and now here Peter stands in a Roman Centurion's house full of Gentiles in Caesarea!! *I wonder if Peter sometimes pinched himself wondering when he was going to wake up from this dream.*

But it wasn't a dream and lots of Gentiles were staring at Peter waiting for what he was going to say next! Cornelius, the centurion commander of the Italian Regiment, spoke: ***"Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, "Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. Send to Joppa for Simon Peter... So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now, we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the LORD has commanded you to tell us."*** (Acts 10:30-33)

Look around the room my friends, what do you see? Men and women, Gentiles, with eyes wide open, leaning forward a bit, all staring at Peter, anxious to hear what he's going to say! And look at the Jewish Jesus followers who came with him from Joppa. They too have their eyes wide open wondering what Peter is going to say. *I think even Peter is wondering what Peter is going to say!* Have you ever been in a situation like this? Peter paused, looked around, prayed silently asking the Holy Spirit to help him, to fill his heart and mind with what Jesus wanted these people to hear. *Taking a deep breath, Peter spoke...words that have gone down in history as dramatic, world changing words!*

"I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the person who fears Him and does what is right..." Did you hear what Peter just said, my friends? ***'God does not show favoritism'!*** Can you believe Peter said that? For his entire life Peter was totally convinced that God DID show favoritism. God's favorite people were Jews, all Jews, any Jews, anywhere in the world Jews!

God ALWAYS preferred Jews over Gentiles, always, in any situation, anywhere in the world. *But now, here in Gentile Cornelius' home, Peter was declaring that he was wrong, that he'd been wrong all his life!*

Now we must understand Peter was NOT making a politically correct statement. He was not saying what he thought these Gentiles wanted to hear. Nor was Peter making a 'saving my own skin' statement, for fear that if he said what he had always believed that he wouldn't get out of that Gentile house alive! *Peter was declaring that as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit in his life he now understood that what Jesus had repeatedly said, He really did mean! God the Father had sent Jesus the Son of God to earth to provide Redemption, rescue from sin for ANY person, from ANY where in ANY generation!* That's why Peter said that he was convinced that **"God...accepts from EVERY nation, the person who fears Him and does what is right."** Now let's not misunderstand. Peter is NOT saying, good behavior is all that is needed for God to save us from our sin. Rather **"doing what is right"** means doing what God has declared is the ONLY way to be saved from our sin, and that is placing our full trust in Jesus and His death and resurrection, to save us!

Peter went on to explain who Jesus was and what His Gospel message was. Then Peter said, **"All the prophets testify about Jesus that everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through His name."** (Acts 10:43) Peter made it clear. Forgiveness of sins was not for sale; no amount of money could be paid. It was not available to be earned by hard work, Jesus had already done all the saving work. Forgiveness of sins for these Gentiles in Caesarea was, as it had been for Peter and the Jews in Jerusalem; and for Philip and the Samaritans; and even for the Ethiopian official... **it was a work of Grace by God in response to full Faith in Jesus Christ alone!** (Ephesians 2:8,9) Do you understand that my friends? While Luke doesn't tell us it happened, I have to believe applause suddenly broke out in this house, and shouts of great joy and celebration... maybe even dancing! *The greatest news imaginable had just been proclaimed by Peter the Jewish apostle of Jesus! God was ready to save even Gentiles in Caesarea!!*

Let's pause right here my friends and watch the celebration as Cornelius and these Gentiles began to understand the nearly unbelievable truth which Peter was proclaiming. *Do you believe it to be true? That forgiveness of sins is available from God for any person, anywhere in the world, if they will turn to God in full faith in Jesus Christ?* That truth should unite our entire world in celebration, and here's a song to help us understand the sheer magnitude of it all! Praise Jesus today my friends...

Today's Scripture is Acts 10:23-43.