

## **“GENTILES HEAR THE GOOD NEWS.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

**October 20, 2019, 10:30 AM**

### **Scripture Texts: Acts 10:23-43**

**Prayer:** Holy Father, by your Holy Spirit speak to all our hearts the Words of Life, your truth, fresh manna, what will glorify you, magnify Jesus, exalt your Word and edify our eternal souls.

### **A Jew meets a Gentile.**

Three men came from Caesarea, sent by the Roman centurion Cornelius to find Peter in Joppa. Now ten men are on their way from Joppa to Caesarea for a historic encounter arranged by God.

Why does Peter take six brothers with him? To be witnesses of God's divine grace. Keep your eyes open and be ready to testify to the grace of God wherever you see it. I saw it yesterday. It encourages your soul and strengthens your faith and encourages the saints. May our text do all of that for us. God's grace is all around us, live expecting to see it and testify to it.

When they arrived, Cornelius was ready and waiting, he had gathered his relatives, mom, dad, wife, kids, grandparents, friends, associates, servants, and close friends. Why did they all come? No doubt Cornelius had told of his vision from God to send for a great man to come. There was great anticipation and expectation.

This is truly remarkable. To invite a crowd to take up a new religion. What a risk for the glory of God. Cornelius wasn't just interested in this for himself, he wanted it for everyone he knew. He was a beggar not interested in keeping the bread for himself. He wasn't going to keep the treasure buried. What humility, grace, honesty, openness.

What was this angel all about and what was so important about this man Peter and what he had to say? Whatever they were thinking must have been huge because as soon as Peter arrived Cornelius, a Roman military officer, threw himself down at Peter's feet. One wonders if they thought him to be some kind of god or angel, a heaven-sent messenger.

Peter begins rather awkwardly, “You all know it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with the like of you, right?” Peter says what's going on here is of great significance for it is

against all ancient tradition for a Jew to enter a Gentiles home. Peter is breaking a longstanding taboo because God showed him in a vision that no human being is common, profane, impure or unclean.

Peter asks Cornelius “why am I here?” And for the third time the story is told of why Cornelius has sent for Peter.

### **Gentiles in the presence of God.**

Cornelius makes a remarkable statement, saying they are in the presence of God, and that what Peter has to say is a word from the Lord, commanded by the Lord to be given to them. “God has sent you and you have our undivided attention. Speak to us the words God has given you to speak to us.”

Clearly the Holy Spirit of God has been preparing this whole special occasion, the first time the Gospel is preached to the Gentiles. Could this be the most important sermon Peter ever preached? Cornelius sees God as central to all that is happening, Peter is only the messenger. God speaks out of the mouths of His messengers.

This is every preachers dream. No greater words could be said to any preacher of God’s Word. Cornelius, not yet a Christian, recognizes something all Christians should recognize. Whenever a Christian congregation gathers together to hear the Gospel, they do so in the presence of God.

We should be this humble, hungry, ready, expectant when we come before God and His Word.

How do we come each Sunday to worship? How do we think about coming to hear the Word of God expounded? How do we treat God and His holy things? How do we prepare? What do we pray and ask God to do? Those who expect little receive little and those who expect much receive much.

### **Gentiles hear the Gospel.**

Peter begins with a personal statement of his own transformation and his new understanding of God and His ways.

God has heard the prayers of a Gentile. God has accepted the good works of someone who is not a Jew. God has sent one of His holy angels from heaven to him. God knows his name and has sent Peter to him because he is worthy of receiving the Gospel.

Peter is acknowledging and, in a sensing, confirming in his own mind that it is OK to preach the Gospel to these gathered Gentiles.

Before Peter's deep-seated prejudice had kept him blind, unable to see that God could love others besides Jews. But God does not regard externals like race. Nothing in our outward appearance or our outward circumstances prevents God from choosing and approving someone.

Clear God is revealing something new, that He shows no favoritism or partiality. God does not favor capitalist over communists, Republicans over Democrats, Christian School kids over public school kids, whites over Hispanics, white collar workers over blue collar workers, Huskie fans over Cougar fans, Americans over Canadians, marrieds over singles, rich over poor. There are no second-class citizens.

God makes no judgments based of appearance, race, sex, nationality, status or class. Anyone who fears God and loves righteousness is acceptable to him. Jesus is Lord of all, of everyone.

What follows is Luke's brief summary of Peter's sermon, which no doubt was much longer.

After that little introduction, Peter starts preaching in verse 36. He has one message that has several parts. What he preaches is Jesus. The central person in the universe, in human history, in the lives of the Jews, in the lives of the Gentiles, in our lives. We all need the same Jesus, the same Gospel. It is a ***Gospel of peace***, of salvation and reconciliation with God and each other.

Peter gives the reason for all God does up front. The whole point of Jesus' condescending to humiliate Himself and come to earth and endure so disgraceful a death as death on a cross was to restore what was lost, to reconcile us to our God and Father. He took on Himself what was deserving of God's wrath and made us acceptable and favorable to the Father again. He opened heaven back up to us.

### **Peter preaches a basic four-point sermon.**

***First***, he mentions Jesus' life and ministry and how God anointed Him with power by the Holy Spirit. This Jesus is clearly from heaven. Everything about Him and what He did points to God.

And His spiritual power was greater than the power of evil and of the devil. Christ came to destroy the works of the devil.

The effects of Satan's lies, and destruction are all around us, everywhere. The trail of destruction, destroyed lives, hopelessness, despair, heartache, fear, anxiety, hate. Everywhere there is evidence of the fall, sin, sickness, natural disasters, and death.

And Jesus entered enemy territory and started destroying the works of the devil. Everywhere he went He challenged Satan and won. He healed diseases, He cast out demons, He tamed nature, He raised the dead. Whatever Satan did, Jesus undid it. And most of all He forgave sins and He conquered death and gave eternal life.

Everything in your life that is bad, Jesus has already overcome, He has the victory already.

**I Corinthians 6:9-11 (NASB)** Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Such were some of you. The church of Jesus Christ all over the earth is filled with sinners like that who have been rescued and redeemed and reconciled to the Father and set free from the tyranny of sin and Satan. That is what Christ does. "He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil."

Peter is giving first hand testimony, he saw and heard and experience what he is talking about. You can tell when people don't have firsthand knowledge or firsthand faith, that they are talking on borrowed ideas, not what is close, personal, real.

When I am introduced to a stranger as a pastor some will try to make a connection with me by saying something like, "Oh, my grandfather was a pastor, or I have an uncle who is a Christian, or maybe a real stretch by saying, "Oh, cool, I consider myself a spiritual person."

Make your testimony firsthand, not a hand me down. Make your faith personal, out of a real relationship with Jesus through time spent with Him as a true friend, in personal prayer.

**Second**, Peter preaches the death of Jesus. The authorities killed Jesus. But notice Peter doesn't leave it at that, on the human level. Jesus' death was not just a tragic case of gross injustice, the killing of an innocent man.

Peter adds what might sound like a strange reference or unimportant detail, that Jesus was hanged on a tree. Calling the cross a tree has great theological weight, Jesus bore a curse for those who should have been cursed. This was Jesus bearing God's judgment on our sins.

Then comes the crescendo, the great *third* point. Some of you might remember my Easter sermon three years ago, But God. One of my favorite phrases in Scripture. But God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day. But the power of God defeated Satan and sin and death. But God. It changes everything, it turns everything upside down.

This event was not just human, it was divine. God was in it. And it was physically and historically verifiable. There were witnesses, and Peter was one of them. Jesus wasn't a ghost or apparition, He ate and drank with them.

I heard yesterday at the funeral of a person who believes science has proved there is no God. As I thought about that I realized some of us would have a hard time figuring out how to answer that. The simplest, plainest response, Christ is risen.

Christ is risen! That's not just an Easter Sermon, that's an everyday in the trenches sermon. That's truth you have to keep reminding yourself when it seems like the devil is winning.

*Fourth*, this Jesus who is the peace of God, who is Savior of all, and Lord of all, is judge of all.

The judgment to come has a place in an evangelistic message, in a message seeking to bring someone to saving knowledge of Jesus. Warning about judgment and hell is not necessarily manipulative. Scripture is full of such warnings.

**Mark 8:36** What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul.

We live in an age of pluralism and one of the casualties is any belief in heaven and hell. "Imagine there is no heaven above us and no hell below us, it's easy if you try" (John Lennon).

But there is in the conscience of all people a right sense that sin should be punished. When we hear of some terrible crime or injustice or abuse, we want the ones who did it brought to justice and punished. Yes, there will be justice, a righting of all wrongs by the righteous judge.

“Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, will decide where you spend eternity. And what he decides in that moment, you decide now. You will either be condemned justly for all your sins and sent to everlasting torment (Revelation 14:11), or you will be acquitted, pardoned, and received into everlasting joy” (John Piper).

Everyone who believes, everyone, even now the Gentiles from all nations, everyone who believes receives the most marvelous gift of all, the forgiveness of all our sins.

Do you want the forgiveness of your sins? Here it is, you don’t have to look anywhere else.

Do you have the forgiveness of your sins? Have you stopped and thanked God recently?

This is the Gospel, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus personally experienced and believed. This is what Jesus has given us to believe and to proclaim.

What a glorious message plainly and simply spoken, yet it is all here, the history, the theology, the Gospel. It is completely focused on Jesus, a historical person who really came to us, and a divine person through whom we are offered salvation and escape from eternal judgment.

Salvation and eternal life are available to all. Glory to God.

### **Implications and application.**

So what? What can we glean from this passage of Scripture?

**First**, examine your own heart for pride and prejudice. Where are pride and prejudice keeping you from God’s purpose or will, keeping you from forgiving someone, from giving grace?

**Second**, “Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (I Peter 3:15).

Dan Williams’ class, next week will help us deal with the challenge to our faith that pluralism presents.

Are you open to being used like Peter? Are you willing to risk for the glory of the Gospel? With whom are you willing to share the riches of the Gospel? Will we keep our light under a bushel or let it shine and do others some good? Glory to God for the Gospel that brings us peace.