**Cornelius Gets Some Respect**

(Acts 10:34-48)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

As you may remember, Rodney Dangerfield was famous for getting *no* respect. He once said, “My doctor told me I was overweight.” I told him, “I want a second opinion.” He replied, “All right. *You’re ugly too!”*

He also once said, “I don’t even get respect at home. Last week my house was on fire, and the kids were *screaming.* My wife told them, ‘Quiet down or you’ll wake your father!’”

Well, it’s pretty bad when even your *wife* doesn’t give you any respect. But just imagine for a moment what it would be like if *God* gave you no respect. Here in our text in Acts 10, we’ve come to the end of the story of a Gentile named Cornelius. And if you know your Bible you know that Gentiles like Cornelius went *1500 years* without getting respect from God.

But here in Acts 10, God showed Peter that *that changed* back in Acts 9 when He saved Saul and sent him to the Gentiles. And now Peter is going to tell Cornelius about the respect that God was now giving the Gentiles:

**“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34).**

Now as a Jew who knew his Bible, Peter knew that in time past God *was* a respecter of persons. He respected the person of Jews, but not Gentiles. But after seeing that sheet vision earlier in the chapter, he now “perceived” that his was no longer the case.

But there is something I need to point out here so you don’t get confused when reading the Old Testament, for there are verses back there that suggest God *wasn’t* a respecter of persons even in those days—as we see when the king of Israel said to Israel’s judges:

**“Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the LORD… for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, *nor respect of persons,* nor taking of gifts” (II Chronicles 19:5-7).**

But in this verse had to do with how God didn’t respect the *rich* over the *poor,* and didn’t allow them to bribe Him with “gifts.” That was His way of reminding Israel’s judges that *they* shouldn’t respect the rich over the poor either, but letting them bribe their way to receiving a more favorable judgment. But God *was* a respecter of persons in time past when it came to Jews and Gentiles.

**“But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him” (Acts 10:35).**

Now the fear of the Lord has always been where salvation has to start. I know there’s Christians who say you shouldn’t *scare* unbelievers into getting saved with all that talk about hell fire and brimstone. But down south they used to have a saying: It’s better to be *hell-scared* than *hell-scorched.* So don’t let talk like that make you shy away from warning unsaved people about the imminent danger of eternal punishment.

But when Peter talked about *working righteousness,* that shows you that he might have known that Gentiles were no longer common or unclean, but he *didn’t* know anything about Paul’s new message of grace. Because working righteousness is not something that we have to do to be saved today. But it *was* what men had to do to be saved under the law, as we see when the psalmist asked God,

**“Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, *and worketh righteousness…”* (Psalm 15:1,2).**

If a man wanted to be saved under the law, he had to work righteousness by dpoing what the psalmist told his countrymen in Israel to do in Psalm 4:4,5:

**“Stand in awe…offer *the sacrifices of righteousness…”***

To stand in awe of God was just another way of saying to fear Him! Under the law Jews had to fear God and work righteousness by bringing *sacrifices* of righteousness, and by doing all of the *other* things the law required for salvation.

And that never changed for the Jews under the law, as we see when the apostle John later wrote,

**“…every one *that doeth righteousness* is born of Him” (I John 2:29).**

But all that *had* changed for Jews *and* Gentiles who were saved under the ministry of Paul under grace.

But Peter didn’t know anything about that, so he went on in our text to talk about what he *did* know:

**“The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)” (Acts 10:36).**

Now notice that God sent Christ to preach peace *to the children of Israel,* and *not* to the Gentiles. Isaiah predicted of Him,

**“…unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor…*The Prince of Peace”* (Isaiah 9:6).**

But the Lord didn’t come offering that peace to just anybody. Peter said,

**“Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be *a Prince and a Saviour,* for to give repentance *to Israel,* and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31).**

Christ came to be the Prince of Peace *to Israel,* and *their* Savior, not the Savior of the Gentiles.

And we know that didn’t change at Pentecost, for on that historic feast day Peter cried,

**“…let *all the house of Israel* know assuredly, that…the promise is *unto you…*” (Acts 2:36-39).**

Promises like the one Isaiah made were made *to Israel.*

But remember, that’s not because God didn’t *like* Gentiles. It was because He wanted the Jews to get saved first, so He could use them to reach the Gentiles, as Peter explained in Acts 3:26:

**“Unto you *first* God*,* having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:26).**

That word “first” there means that God planned to turn the Gentiles away from *their* sins eventually.

But while God sent the Lord to the Jews, He made such a splash that the Gentiles couldn’t help but notice Him and His ministry, as we see as we read on in our text:

**“That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached” (Acts 10:37).**

Those words “ye know” there show that the Lord’s ministry might have been to the Jews, but even Gentiles like Cornelius had heard about it—and how He hadn’t come to minister to *them.* Shucks even John the Baptist respected the person of the Jews over the Gentiles, as Paul expressed when he declared,

**“…God according to His promise raised *unto Israel* a Saviour, Jesus: When John had first preached before His coming the baptism of repentance *to all the people of Israel”* (Acts 13:23,24).**

Now that’s significant because many of our Baptist friends believe that “the church, which is His Body” (Eph.1:22,23), the church made of Jews and Gentiles, *began* with John the Baptist. But John preached to *Jews,* not Gentiles.

And speaking of John, he’s the one who helped God with something we read about when Peter went on to tell Cornelius,

**“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him” (Acts 10:38).**

Now as you may remember, God anointed the Lord with the Holy Ghost immediately after John baptized Him, as Mark tells us in Mark 1:9,10:

**“Jesus…*was baptized of John in Jordan.* And straightway coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened, *and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him.”***

And that anointing is what gave the Lord the power to do all the good things He did, like healing all that were oppressed of the devil, as the Lord explained when He said,

**“…the Father that dwelleth in Me, *He doeth the works”* (John 14:10).**

The Lord Jesus never did any miracles, but His Father did *plenty* of them *by Him,* as Peter said earlier in our study of Acts:

**“…Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, *which God did by Him* in the midst of you…” (Acts 2:22).**

That’s why Peter says that God anointed the Lord with the Holy Ghost “and with power.” He was talking about *miracle-working* power. That’s also why he *added* that the Lord went about healing all that were oppressed of the devil *“for* God was with Him.” That’s *how* He was able to heal people—because God was with Him!

Whenever I think of how the Lord didn’t do His own miracles, I think of that old movie *Flashdance.* It was about a young lady who was a welder at a steel mill in Pittsburg, but who went on to become a professional dancer. At the time the movie was in the theaters, women everywhere were wondering if the actress in the movie did her own dancing. Meantime, all of us men wanted to know if she did her own *welding!*

Well, the Lord didn’t do His own miracles—and there are people who don’t believe He did *any miracles at all.* Thomas Jefferson was one of them. Someone emailed me at *Berean Bible Society* recently to ask if it was true that our third president wrote his own version of the New Testament *omitting* all of the Lord’s miracles, leaving only the narrative story of His life and His teachings. And yes, it’s true. You can even buy a copy of his New Testament online from Amazon for $11.95. I wouldn’t recommend it though!

But the Lord had *witnesses* to His miracles, and Peter was one of them, as he went on in Acts 10 to say:

**“And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree**

**“Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;**

**“Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead” (Acts 10:39-41).**

Now when Peter says that he and the other apostles were “witnesses” of the Lord, it’s important to remember that they didn’t witness like you witness. You tell people that “Christ died for our sins” (I Cor. 15:3), but that’s *not* the gospel that the Lord ordained the 12 to witness. As you can see, they were witnesses of the Lord’s resurrection.

We see further proof of this when the apostles went to pick a replacement for Judas, and Peter said of the candidates:

**“of these men...must one be ordained to be a witness with us *of His resurrection”* (Acts 1:21,22).**

Later Peter added,

**“This Jesus *hath God raised up,* whereof we all are *witnesses”* (Acts 2:32).**

**“Ye men of Israel…killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; *whereof we are witnesses”* (Acts 3:12-15).**

Peter was sent to witness the Lord’s resurrection, but do you see anything in those verses about His resurrection paying for our sins, as Paul told the Romans when he wrote,

**“…Jesus our Lord…was delivered for our offences, *and was raised again for our justification”* (Romans 4:24,25).**

That’s not how the twelve preached Christ’s resurrection! They didn’t preach it as good news.

Let me ask you, if you were a character in one of those Marvel comic book superhero movies, and you somehow managed to kill the most powerful superhero in the universe, and then you heard he rose from the dead—would you take that as good news? You’d take that as *bad* news*—at least for you,* for you know he’ll be hunting you down to get his revenge!

Well, that’s how the twelve peached the resurrection. They said to the Jews, “You killed Him, but He’s alive, and He’s coming back!” Even after Pentecost, Peter preached:

**“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. *Him hath God exalted with his right hand*…And we are His witnesses *of these things”* (Acts 5:30-32).**

That’s significant in that Pentecost is when many *other* Baptists think the church of the Body of Christ began. But if it did, it began without any mention of Christ dying for anyone’s sins. It actually began with Paul, who was the first to proclaim His death for our sins. All Peter ever preached is that God raised Christ up and showed Him openly, but only to apostles.

Here it is tempting to ask why He *didn’t* show the Lord openly to all the people of Israel. I mean, if He had, maybe they’d have believed on Him. Think about it. If you killed a man who claimed to be God, and he rose from the dead, wouldn’t you believe on Him? You’d think so—but what did the Lord say about that?

**“If they hear not Moses and the prophets, *neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead”* (Acts 16:31).**

You know what that means, don’t you? It means that when you get to thinking that if you could just do a miracle that all of your friends and loved ones would believe, just put yourself on the pay-no-mind list, for God’s Word says that *that’s not how it works.*

Now the Lord has a plan to show Himself openly to all the people of Israel, and all of the people of the rest of the world as well. It’s called the second coming of Christ, and when it happens,

**“…*every eye shall see Him,* and they also which pierced Him: *and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him”* (Revelation 1:7).**

Of course, when the Lord shows Himself to all the people of Israel, it won’t be to get them to believe. It will be to get them to *wish* they’d have believed when they had the chance.

Now when verse 41 says that the Lord *ate* with His witnesses after He rose from the dead, that was to prove He wasn’t a ghost, that He had risen *bodily* from the dead. That’s important because you’re going to meet people who say goofy things like, “I believe He rose from the dead in the sense that the spirit of His teachings lives on!” No! “Up from the grave He arose,” as His people love to sing! And “if Christ be not risen, ye are yet in your sins,” Paul told the Corinthians.

Of course, that’s not what the Lord told Peter to tell the Jews, as we see as we read on in our text:

**“And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead” (Acts 10:42).**

After the Lord rose, he didn’t tell Peter to tell the people of Israel that He had risen to be their *Savior.* He told Peter to tell them that He had risen to be their *judge.*

But it’s not like Peter didn’t have *any* good news for the Jews, as we see as we continue on in Acts 10:

**“To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).**

Now here it’s important to remember that faith in the Lord’s name was all the Jews had to have to be saved, as John made clear when he wrote,

**“…believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God…that…ye might have life *through His name”* (John 20:31).**

But Paul says that today, in the dispensation of grace, we have to have “faith *in His blood”* to be saved, not faith in His name (Rom.3:25). Plus, to *obtain* the “remission of sins” that Peter offered the Jews, they had to do *more* than just have faith in His name. There was an additional step they had to take to be saved, one that Peter explained in Acts 2:38:

**“Peter said*…be baptized*…in the name of Jesus Christ *for the remission of sins”***

We know that that’s the only gospel he ever preached, for even after he learned from Paul that Christ died for our sins, he still insisted that “baptism doth also now *save us”* (IPet.3:21).

The reason I harp on this in our studies is to remind you that Peter’s message was *different* from Paul’s message, right down to the gospel they preached. So don’t be looking to Peter’s epistles to guide you now that you’re saved. Look to Paul’s epistles instead!

But now, don’t forget what God is doing here in Acts 10. He’s using Peter to introduce Paul’s new message about the dispensation of the mystery, a dispensation in which water baptism would no longer be required for the remission of sins. A dispensation that *interrupted* God’s prophetic program for Israel.

And what better way to introduce it than to interrupt Peter before he got a chance to *tell* Cornelius he had to be baptized to receive the remission of sins that he just mentioned. And that’s exactly what God did, as we see as we continue in our text:

**“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word” (Acts 10:44).**

As you can see, God didn’t *let* Peter tell Cornelius to be baptized for the remission of sins. He filled those Gentiles with the Spirit first. And that is *not* how things were supposed to happen, as Peter made clear in Acts 2:38 when he told the people of Israel,

**“…be baptized…for the remission of sins, *and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”***

They were supposed to get baptized and *then* be filled with the Spirit. When they were filled with the Spirit *before* being baptized, Peter was astonished—but that’s not the only reason he was astonished, as we see as we read on in our text:

**“And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 10:45).**

Peter was astonished that *anyone* got the Spirit before getting baptized, but he was *especially* astonished that the Gentiles would be given the Spirit *at all. Especially* because—if case you hadn’t noticed—Peter hasn’t been preaching the gospel to those Gentiles. He’d just been telling them what gospel he preached to the Jews!

That is, he wasn’t giving those men of other nations a *motivational* speech, in an attempt to motivate them to believe on the Lord. He was giving them what’s called an *informational* speech, informing them of what *Jews* had to believe to be saved and filled with the Spirit. He never expected God to start saving Gentiles before all Israel was saved, as we’ve seen from our past lessons, and he was *astonished* that He did.

Now if you’re wondering how those Jews *knew* that the Gentiles were filled with the Spirit, we find out in Acts 10:46:

**“For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God…”**

Isn’t that what happened when the twelve were filled with the Spirit? Acts 2:4 says,

**“…they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, *and began to speak with other tongues.*”**

By the way, when it says that they magnified God when they spoke in tongues, that’s one of many proofs that we have that the gift of tongues *in the Bible* was the ability to speak in known, identifiable human languages, and not in the gibberish in which men speak in tongues today. If a man is speaking gibberish, you can’t tell if he’s magnifying God or moaning about the results of the last election.

But now, what would you do in this situation if you were Peter, and what was happening in *your* world didn’t seem to make any sense? Well, what he did is a good example for us to follow when things in *our* world don’t seem to make sense, as we see as we read the final two verses of our text:

**“Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?**

**“And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days” (Acts 10:47,48).**

When Peter saw that things just weren’t adding up, he stood firmly on the Word of God and did what the Lord told him to do and baptized Cornelius and his loved ones. In other words, he stuck with what the Word of God told him to do.

Is there anything you can learn from that? When things in *your* world “don’t compute,” as we used to say, you can’t go wrong if *you too* stand on the Word of God *to you* found in the epistles of our apostle Paul.

What Peter was thinking was, “Well, it wasn’t supposed to happen this way. They weren’t supposed to get the Spirit before being baptized, but they did, so—can anybody think of a reason why we shouldn’t baptized them anyway?” I guess no one could, for we have no record of anyone responding to his question, leading Peter to command that they be baptized as the Lord had sent him to do.

Now before we close this study, we have to ask why God chose to give the gift of tongues to those Gentiles in the first place. We know why He gave it to *the Jews.* It was because someday,

**“…ten men shall take hold *out of all languages of the nations,* even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you” (Zechariah 8:23).**

God gave *the Jews* the gift of tongues so they could give the gospel to the Gentiles. But there’d be no reason to give that gift to Gentiles. So why did He do it?

Well, Paul explained it later when the Corinthian Gentiles started speaking in tongues, and thinking they were all that because of it. Paul let all the hot air out of their puffed-up balloon when he told them,

**“…tongues *are for a sign…”* (I Corinthians 14:22).**

That’s Paul’s way of telling them, “God just *using* you to send a message, to give someone a sign.” And we don’t have to guess who the sign of tongues was meant for, for earlier in that epistle Paul told them, “*the Jews* require a sign.” So God gave the gift of tongues to the Corinthians just to give the Jews a sign.

A sign *of what?* you ask? A sign that God’s judgment had fallen on Israel for crucifying the Lord and stoning His prophet, as we see when Paul told them,

**“In the law it is written, *With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people*; and yet for all that will they not hear Me, saith the Lord” (I Corinthians 14:21).**

In the law that God wrote to the Jews, it was written, in effect, “When you start hearing *Gentiles* speak to you in tongues, that’ll be a sign that you haven’t been hearing Me when I spoke to you in Hebrew, so I had to speak to you *through the Gentiles.”* When God took that Jewish gift of tongues and gave it to the Gentiles, that was a sign that He was judging the nation of Israel.

You may be thinking, “If that’s true, shouldn’t Gentiles speak in tongues today? Doesn’t God still want Jews to know that He’s judging them?” If so, the answer is *no!* That’s *not* what God wants Jews to know today under grace! That was Peter’s message during the transition time from law to grace, but it is our job to let Jews know that God loves them and Christ died for them. And that they can be saved just like Gentiles are saved by *believing* that God loves them and Christ died for them, *without* being baptized with water and without working righteousness.

In closing, we’ll learn some more details about this amazing turning point in God’s dealings with men in our next lesson on Acts 11, when Peter is called on to give an account of his actions in hobnobbing with a Gentile like Cornelius!