

Bible e-Study on the book of Acts (10)

Back to Peter by way of Cornelius

‘Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God.’ Acts 10:4c

NUGGET – In the vision Cornelius received, he is visited by an angel with a message from God. Before telling Cornelius to send for Peter the angel tells him that his prayers and gifts have been received by God as a memorial offering. There is a ‘code’ in these words that we need to break.

By beginning his message this way, the angel reveals to us that Cornelius is someone who understands, celebrates and accepts Jewish ceremonial religious laws and customs. In using the phrase ‘come up as a memorial gift’ Cornelius was being told that, just like the smoke from the grain offering that is burned on the altar rises to God, so also his prayers and gifts to the poor have risen to the God of heaven and earth.

This would be understood only by someone who knew the ‘code’ out of Leviticus 2:2 which says in part, “burn this as a memorial portion on the altar, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.” God hears the prayers of those who trust in Him and the ways that He has shown to all people through His word. Just as He showed Cornelius through the word of the Old Testament and it’s covenant, so also today it is only through the new covenant in the blood of Jesus that God is revealed to all people. But back to the words of the angel, they show us the Cornelius would have understood what the angel was saying regarding how God was choosing to deal with him.

And speaking of how God was choosing to deal with Cornelius, take note that God did not simply reveal Jesus to him. God was choosing to use the means of proclamation. God wanted Cornelius, and those with him, to hear the testimony of Peter in order to understand that Jesus is the Son of God. Cornelius was not only a roman citizen and centurion, a man of power and probably of some wealth, but he was also, according to Jewish understanding

- a Gentile
- and a godly man

God's old covenant was the ‘code’ that Cornelius had trusted in and God acknowledged this through the message of the angel. And through the proclamation of Peter at the direction of God, Cornelius was being given the new code – the new covenant – found only in Jesus Christ. Of course in verse 47 this is confirmed when Peter says that ‘they have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.’

Now if Peter had rejected the message of God through the demonstration with the sheet and the unclean animals we Gentiles would still be on the outside looking in. But God choose to use Peter and others to show that His mercy in Christ is for all people. What is needed today though is what God directed Peter to do – go and proclaim Jesus and the forgiveness of sins in His name.

APPLICATION -

1. It is easy to presume that we are Christians, most of us having been raised that way. But stop for a moment and put yourself in Cornelius’ life situation. Here is a Roman soldier likely far from home and how he was raised. And living among these very strange and different people, he learns of their ways and how it is they worship only one God. How strange *that* must have seemed to him. Yet God, through His people draws this man to Himself through the old covenant as He had intended for His people to make known in the world. This man, this Gentile, learns to trust in this One God and from this comes the story we have today. I guess the application I would ask you to consider is just how grateful we must be to God for His mercy. We are not of His chosen people by birth. We are without a heritage that is godly by nature. We are blank slates, free independent beings and yet God has chosen to reveal Himself to us and called us and made us His own in Jesus Christ. How then do we *now* see ourselves? How do we live in this adoption that we’ve received into the grace of God?

PRAY – Take time to thank God for His mercy to Peter in showing him that all things from God are good and clean and in showing Cornelius, and all Gentiles, that through Jesus alone is the forgiveness of sins.