

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
October 18, 2015

Lesson Text: Acts 10:24-38

Lesson Title: Breaking Down Barriers

Introduction

Although Peter is the leader of the apostles, it has been a while since we last heard from him. He has not been mentioned since Acts 8:14-25 when he and John were sent to Samaria to assess what was happening as a result of Philip's preaching. From Samaria, Peter and John traveled to the city of "Lydda," (Acts 9:32-43) about 25 miles from Jerusalem. There Peter met a man named "Aeneas" (Acts 9:33) who was stricken with palsy for eight years. "Aeneas" is healed when Peter said, "*Jesus Christ maketh thee whole*" (Acts 9:34) and everyone in "Lydda" and "Saron" which saw the miracle "*turned to the Lord*" (Acts 9:35).

God's grace continues to work through Peter in "Joppa" when a woman named "Tabitha," fell sick and died (Acts 9:36-37). Since the city of "Lydda" was close to "Joppa," the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent for him to come and help this woman. Instead of immediately burying Tabitha, as was the Jewish custom, they called for Peter. These people have heard the miraculous works happening through the apostles and they believe their deceased loved one can be raised from the dead. Peter came and as Peter "*kneeled down and prayed*" he said, "*Tabitha, arise*" (Acts 9:40). Tabitha was raised from the dead as a result of Peter's ministry. Once again, "*many believed on the Lord*" (Acts 9:42).

These two miraculous events prove that no barrier is too big for the Lord. God can do whatever He chooses to do in accordance with His word. Why did He heal "Aeneas?" Why did He raise "Tabitha" from the dead? Because He is the God of grace and the God of glory.

In Acts 10:1, Peter is sent to "Caesarea" to a man named "Cornelius." What is happening now in Acts is different from the first nine chapters. The gospel is moving toward the Gentiles. Peter is no longer in Jerusalem. He is in "Caesarea." "Caesarea" was named in honor of Augustus Caesar, the Caesar who was in power at the time of Jesus' birth. The city of "Caesarea" was built by Herod the Great and is about 30 miles north of the city of Joppa. "Caesarea" is the first city mentioned in Acts where the church is totally Gentiles. The Christian church at "Caesarea" is not Jewish, not a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. It is filled with Gentiles.

“Cornelius” was a “*centurion of the band called the Italian band*” (Acts 10:1). He was a Roman soldier in charge of one hundred men. Although “Cornelius” was not a Jew, he was a very religious man who feared God and prayed. One day while he was praying, “*he saw a vision*” involving an “*angel of God*” (Acts 10:3-8). His initial response to this angelic visitor was fear (Acts 10:4). His fear did not prevent him from listening and obeying the voice of the Lord. He is told to send men to Joppa and look for Simon, whose surname is Peter. Cornelius sends two of his men to get Peter and bring him to Caesarea. Before the men arrive in Caesarea, Peter is on the housetop praying and he sees a vision from heaven (Acts 10:9-18). He sees a sheet full of animals, some clean and some unclean. The subject of clean and unclean was important to a Jew so this vision had Peter’s full attention.

According to Jewish law there were some animals that were clean to eat and some that could not be eaten. In his vision Peter refuses to eat anything the Jewish law deems unclean (Acts 10:13-15). Three times this message is given to Peter but he does not understand how he can eat things the law declares unclean (Acts 10:17-18). While Peter thinks about what he has witnessed and what the Lord has said, the men sent by Cornelius arrive, find Peter, stay the night, and the next day escort him to Caesarea (Acts 10:19-23).

Peter, the Jew, has a God ordained meeting with Cornelius the Gentile. Through Jewish eyes, Peter, the clean, is having a meeting with Cornelius, the unclean. The vision God has given Peter will open the door for Peter to see that God’s grace is available to the Gentiles.

Peter’s Meeting with Cornelius (Acts 10:24-30)

Verse 24-26

“And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.”

When Peter arrived in Caesarea at the house of Cornelius, many “kinsmen and near friends” were awaiting Peter’s arrival. As Peter walked in, Cornelius “met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.” As a Gentile, Cornelius is so overwhelmed that Peter, a Jew, has come to minister to him, he bows down and attempts to worship him. Cornelius sees Peter as the doorway to God’s grace and reverences him.

“Caesarea” was a strange world to a Jew. Peter is far from the humble little Galilean village in which he had grown up. It would have been easy for Peter to have felt superior to Cornelius, but God’s grace will not allow that to happen. When Cornelius attempts to worship him, Peter says, “Stand up; I myself also

am a man.” God’s grace is working here as the distance between Jew and Gentile is narrowing.

Verse 27-28

“And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.”

Cornelius was excited to have Peter come to his home. Upon entrance into Cornelius’ home, “he,” Peter, “talked” with Cornelius. The word “talked” means “they conversed and communed.” The spiritual hunger of Cornelius must have been evident to Peter. If Peter did not fully understand the vision of the sheet filled with animals, he begins to understand it now and he talks with Cornelius and “many that were come together.”

Peter began to talk to Cornelius’ friends and neighbors about how it was “an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation.” The word “unlawful” means “illegal, abominable.” Everyone in the house that day would have known exactly what Peter was talking about. The Old Testament did not specifically say that it was “unlawful” for a “Jew to keep company” with a Gentile or come unto a Gentile nation. The Rabbis added that to the law. The strict Jew took the word of the Rabbis, added it to their heritage of separation, and concluded it was “unlawful,” to come in contact with Gentiles.

Peter wanted the people in Cornelius’ house to understand God had “shewed him that he should not call any man uncommon or unclean.” What Peter is doing is a response to the work of the Lord. Only God could have revealed to Peter that no man should be despised or viewed as unclean. The Gospel was to be preached to all mankind, Jew and Gentile.

Note: Although this is a monumental historical occasion in the life of the church and the spread of the gospel, please do not miss the personal aspect of this occasion. “Cornelius” has received the gospel and is a Christian. God is working in the life of this Gentile military leader. His heart and home have been opened to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Verse 29

“Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?”

“Therefore,” is a reference to God’s revelation to Peter and His intervention in Peter’s life. Peter came to the house of Cornelius because God sent him. He

came “without gainsaying.” That means he came “promptly.” Once God showed him the vision and gave him instruction, he obeyed (Psalm 119:60). Few Christians today are willing to obey the Lord and even fewer are obeying without delay. Peter came “as soon” as he was “sent for.” What a great testimony!

“I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?” Peter obeyed without knowing the details. Cornelius’ servants and soldiers came to Joppa to get Peter, but no details were given as to exactly what Cornelius wanted.

Note: Obey without delay. Obey without explanation.

Cornelius’ Explanation to Peter (Acts 10:30-33)

Verse 30-31

“And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.”

Cornelius began to give Peter a play by play of exactly what happened as he was praying in Caesarea. He recounted the exact time, “Four days ago...at the ninth hour.” He recounted His location, “in my house.” He recounted the exact activity, “I was fasting...I prayed in my house.” He recounted what he witnessed, “a man...in bright clothing.” He recounted what he heard, “Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.”

Everything Cornelius told Peter went hand-in-hand with God’s dealings with Peter in Joppa. The visitor “in bright clothing” came from heaven and told Cornelius his “prayer is heard.” God will always answer the prayer of a sincere heart. God “remembered” the “alms” or the generosity of Cornelius. Cornelius may not have been schooled in religious matters but he wanted to know the Lord and He answered his prayer.

Note: A person’s salvation is no accident. Everything is divinely ordered by the Lord just as Cornelius described it to Peter. It is amazing as you read this story how the Lord worked in so many different lives and circumstances to save Cornelius and bring him into contact with Peter. If you pause and examine your own life and salvation, you will find God worked equally in your life to bring you to Himself.

Verse 32

“Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.”

Cornelius believed everything transpiring between he and Peter was ordained by God. God had told him to “send to Joppa, and call Simon.” God had told him Peter was “in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side.” That itself was so strange it had to be ordered by the Lord. God told Cornelius that Peter would “come” and when he arrive he would “speak” or talk to him.

Verse 33

“Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.”

“Immediately” indicates Cornelius did not hesitate to do as he was commanded by the Lord. His words to Peter are gracious and encouraging. “God” is mentioned twice in this verse indicating Cornelius attributes all of this to the working of the Almighty. It was “God” who sent Peter over thirty miles to the north to meet a Gentile. The vision (Acts 10:3-4); the servants sent (Acts 10:5-8); Peter’s vision in Joppa (Acts 10:9-16); the arrival of the servants (Acts 10:17-20); Peter’s willingness to go to Caesarea (Acts 10:21); the very conversation they are having and what Peter is about to say is all ordained by the Lord for the purpose of “hearing all things that are commanded thee of God.”

Cornelius and the people gathered in his home believed God arranged all of this and they are ready to hear what God wants to say to them through Peter. Basically, Cornelius says, “Here we are Peter, we are all ears, preach brother!”

Peter’s Message (Acts 10:34-38)

This passage includes the fullest summary of the apostolic message that we have in Acts. Peter’s message extends from the ministry of John the Baptist to the death and resurrection of Jesus then to the judgment to come. He concluded with a clear indication of what Cornelius and the others had to do in response to his message.

Verse 34-35

“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.”

As soon as Cornelius said, "We are all present to hear," Peter "opened his mouth" and preached the gospel. He began by saying, "Of a truth," or in principle, "I perceive" or know that "God is no respecter of persons." In principle, Peter knew that God shows no partiality. Peter knows that "in every nation" there are people who "feareth him and worketh righteousness." These non-Jewish nations feared the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Although they were not Jewish by race they believed there was one God and that one God was Jehovah.

There are many people and nations who are non-Jewish yet they are "accepted with him." Not being a Jew does not prevent someone from experiencing the grace of God. As long as that individual "worketh righteousness," he can be "accepted with him." The word "accepted" means "approved."

What does someone do to "work righteousness?" That answer is found in John 6:28-29, *"Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."* To hear, believe, and receive the Word of God is to "work righteousness."

Verse 36-38

"The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; 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."

The "word" of God that declared God's salvation was first "sent unto the children of Israel." It is a message of "peace by Jesus Christ." Sinful man is at war with God and is in need of "peace." Jesus Christ alone brings that "peace." Once a man is saved there is no more war between him and God (Romans 5:1; Colossians 1:20).

Those assembled in the house of Cornelius were aware of "Jesus of Nazareth" and all that "was published throughout all Judaea, and Galilee." They knew about the preaching and baptizing of John the Baptist. They knew John's ministry stressed the need for repentance and prepared men for the coming Messiah. They were aware how "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power," how He "went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

As Peter recounted our Lord's ministry he says four words that sums it up. He says, "God was with him." Yes, "God was with Him." Jesus Christ was God in the flesh, and all who witnessed His works, His ministry, and His miracles

recognized the hand of God in all He did. That is Peter's message to Cornelius and his guests. The gospel is about the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

There are still many barriers that prevent the gospel from reaching the lost. The barrier of ignorance, prejudice, and tradition are just a few. What will it take for these barriers to fall in our generation? The answer of course is God. But, it will also take willing Christians like Cornelius and Peter. It will require open hearts and obedience.

Peter's Jewish tradition and thoughts about Gentiles changed in a couple of days. That change resulted in the gospel reaching untold millions. What would happen in your life and church if your attitude toward others changed? We all have biases and barriers in our lives and churches that need to crumble. Will you be willing to listen to the Lord to see those barriers fall? Will you be willing to go somewhere and talk to someone to prove they have fallen? Pray about it and then obey. If you do, someone who needs the gospel will receive it.

Amen.