

Roy's sermon for February 7, 2021

## Acts 10:21-30 'The Two Visions Come Together: Salvation To The Gentiles!'

In last week's passage, Acts 10:9-21 'The Sovereignty of God: One Vision Leads To Another', we continued our encounter with Cornelius, that man of Godly character. That Roman centurion in command of over 100 of the worst men. And we saw that under his sovereignty, God had orchestrated everything, leaving no thing to chance! Cornelius had a vision from God so he sent his men to get Peter. Then while the men were entering the city of Joppa, Peter is up on the roof praying, and he also gets a vision from God to receive those same men. We saw that although we are not puppets or robots, and are completely accountable to God for our lives, He is overruling all things for His Plan and Purpose, and ultimately, for the blessing and benefit of His People!

Acts 10:11-13: that strange vision of that great sheet coming down from heaven with all the creatures of the world in it. Then the Holy Spirit telling Peter to "get up kill and eat" three times. Then also three times, Peter declaring his uprightness, his rule keeping, saying that he had "never eaten anything that was impure or unclean." With the Spirit telling him, "don't you call anything impure that God has called clean", again, three times. And I made the point, that often times people's greatest impediment to coming to Jesus is their 'religiousness'. Jesus had done away with that separation between the Jew and the non-Jew in Matthew 28:18-19, but Peter's former religious practises were preventing him from fulfilling Jesus' Commission for him to go also to the gentiles!

Well, in v19-20 the Holy Spirit says there are "men downstairs looking for you. Don't hesitate to go with them." In v21 he goes downstairs and says, "I'm the one you are looking for." This is where we pick up the narrative today: Acts 10:21-30 'The Two Visions Come Together: Salvation To The Gentiles!'

v21b: "Why have you come?" So while Peter has visions of sheets filled with animals racing through his mind, and God's voice telling him to "kill and eat", he protests "never Lord, never have I done this." But the voice tells him, "don't you call anything impure what God has called clean", and downstairs, he asks the men "Why have you come?" Then in v22 they begin to explain!

But firstly friends, I really hope that you can see an important principle here. *From prayer, to vision, to action.* From prayer to vision to action. But as the parties come together, it is God the Holy Spirit who has gone ahead of them all. Now the vision stuff in this special revelatory way I believe was specific only for the Apostolic time. But the principle of the Spirit of God going before His servants and preparing the way ahead of them, and even opening doors for Christ's gospel message, is indeed how God works!

As I said some weeks ago, when we go in Christ's Name we never go alone, because it is not our message which we carry: it is the message of our Saviour. As does His Spirit, (as did John the Baptist go for Jesus Himself), go before us preparing the hearts and souls of men, women and children, to hear and receive the gospel message of Salvation. And similarly, this is what we are seeing is happening between all of these fellow servants of God! Cornelius, his two servants, that "devout soldier", and Peter.

In v22 Cornelius' servants explain why it is that they have come: "we have come from Cornelius the centurion. He's a righteous and God fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." Now brothers and sisters, what we learn in chapter 11:14 is that the Angel had actually told Cornelius that

Peter would “bring the message through which all of his household will be saved,” Which brings to light for us the frightening reality. This reality is that we can do all the good stuff, (gifts to the poor, pray, go to church, be even of a Godly character), and yet all of that good stuff does not equate to salvation and eternal life! You see, in effect, Cornelius and his family and household at this point were like ‘gentile-Jews’, for want of a better description. What I mean is this: they believe in all of those things which the Jewish people did, in accordance with the Old Testament scriptures. But there was yet one more thing that they needed to do, without which they could never be heirs of eternal life. Do you know what it is? Well Jesus himself tells us in John 14:6 “Jesus answered I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except by me.”

Beloved, I have no doubt that there are many millions of God fearing Jews around the world today, who are devout and sincere in their faith, and yet their deliberate refusal to come to and to accept Jesus as that One who He claimed to be, (even the very son of God who came down to save His people from their sins), means that they are in fact going to hell! You see, there are simply billions upon billions of people around the world today, (and many others who have died and lived throughout the ages), who are devout, yes, who are passionate and sincere in the faith that they have to their dumb idols and false gods. But passion without substance, grace and mercy, adds up to death and hell!

Can you see? That even as upright and Godly and devout a man as Cornelius was, without Jesus, both he and his household are doomed! No, good works and character, even as good as those things may be, will never amount to forgiveness! ‘God-fearing’ (by this I mean an outward acknowledgement of God as creator and ruler of the universe) is good, but submission to Him in obedience through the blood of Jesus shed upon that cross is what saves us. And of course it is Christ Himself who bestows upon us that heart, through which His Spirit enables us to come!

Well it does appear that at this point, Peter begins to understand the meaning of his vision. Although these were gentile men, whom Jews were not permitted to legally either eat with or even gather with, we see in v 23 that “Peter invited the men in to be his guests.” Now I do find it interesting that Peter invited the men in to be his guests in another man's home, but perhaps that tells us a bit more about Peter and his nature of impetuosity and his close relationship with his other friend Peter. But what's also interesting is that nothing is said of the night that all of these men from different worlds spent together under the same roof. Surely there must have been so many questions from all sides, and I guess, an opening up of one to another as they got to know each other around that meal, which had been prepared for Peter while he had been praying!

Anyway, we read in 23b “the next day Peter started out with them.” So he honoured that word which had been spoken to him in v20 from the Holy Spirit about “not hesitating to go with them” because it was indeed the Spirit Himself who had sent them to him!

You know, this is a real blessing which we should all seek to have. Yes, we should covet this gift. This kind of acceptance of God's word, because if God said it, then we should all seek with all our hearts to abide by it. There is so much cherry picking around today when people approach the scriptures. ‘These parts I like and believe. Things like God's love. Forgiveness, heaven and eternal life yes these parts I believe and will hold onto. But accountability for sin, and one's own actions. Consequences for those actions. Judgement and hell, I do not accept. I will not accept. Because to do so, means that my loving God is associated with and even orchestrates such things!’

But brethren, whether or not we accept what God says of Himself is irrelevant. Whether or not the God of the Bible is palatable today is irrelevant. Because our opinion of God will not affect the truth

of God about Himself. Exodus 3:14 "I AM WHO I AM" God said. 'I Am God and there is no other. I have no beginning, and I have no end. Yes I AM God. In need of no one and no thing. Eternity to Eternity I AM God!' No, man's opinion of God matters not. Because man's opinion of God is always changing, but of course the God of the Bible does not change. We are simply called to accept and abide by those truths which He has revealed of Himself!

And so Peter has done this very thing. He leaves with those three men. As he was called to do so by the Holy Spirit. And from chapter 11:12 we learned that six of his Jewish Christian brethren went along with him. Then the following day the 10 men arrive at Cornelius's house in Caesarea. V 24b Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. And from v27 that "there was a large gathering of people." Brothers and sisters, nothing has changed with outreach. When the message of Jesus is preached, we invite our unsaved family and friends and neighbours to hear. Romans 10:12-14: "For there is no difference between the Jew and Gentile, the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who come to him, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"

So like Cornelius, if we want our loved ones to be saved we must invite them to hear the gospel. Yes we prayerfully invite them. We pray before we ask them and we pray while we are asking them. And if they decline, we are gracious in our response, but we continue to pray for them and wait for Providence to invite them again!

Well that is exactly what Cornelius has done before us. Then Peter and the men arrive and v25 "as Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence." Brothers and sisters, there is so much of this sort of stuff around today: people in effect falling down before and paying homage to men and women. They're basically worshipping the people. What is the first commandment? Exodus 20:2-3 "I am the Lord thy God who brought you up out of Egypt out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me." Yes, people deify men and women and fall down before them as though they were not just men and women. But more than men and women. We saw this with Simon the sorcerer. Acts 8:10 "he is the divine power known as the great power." As we have seen, people have this inherent need to worship because we have been created as spiritual beings. But it is easier to worship that which we can see and touch than it is to believe by faith. So, sadly, people lay hold of those demons, even those snake-oil-salesman; yes those Devils, coming as angels of light, believing that somehow they are God, or some kind of god! And that inherent evil in mankind laps it up. As they take their deluded and deceived devotees captive. This stuff is everywhere. And tragically, (and blasphemously so), they do this under the banner of Christian!

Well Peter will have none of it! And that will always be the response of those whose preaching is "pure of heart." Yes, preaching that is only about Jesus, and not about themselves! V26 "But Peter made him get up. "Stand up", he said. "I'm only a man myself." Friends, there are many around today who would love to have Cornelius, people with a simple faith grovelling at their feet. Think about it. The Romanists say, that Peter was their first Pope. Millions upon millions gather every year from around the world to get a glimpse of the Pope passing by and kiss his ring. Peter would be rolling in his grave (were he still there). No, "But Peter made him get up stand up he said, "I'm only a man myself." Think of the contrast with this man whom the Romanists claim was their first Pope, and what happens today. 'Don't worship me - I'm only a flesh and blood man. I've come to tell you about Jesus, not about myself!' As I said some weeks ago brothers and sisters, beware of those who preach themselves, because they are not of Christ!

Well in v27 the two men talk, they move inside, and lo and behold, Peter has a ready-made congregation to preach to. But he must yet again overcome his religious past, as we read in v28: “he said to them, “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him.” Beloved, as I mentioned when we first encountered Cornelius, this was the reality that he was faced with and this was the step of faith which he was confronted with. The Jew and the non-Jew were not campfire buddies. There were even religious legal barriers which would keep these two men apart. But when Jesus went to the cross He did away with all of those things. John 12:31-32 “Now is the time for the judgement on this world; now the Prince of this world will be driven out. But I when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself.” So when Jesus went to the cross, judgement fell upon humanity with Satan and his angels. The only thing which remains to take place His executing of the sentence! Yes when Jesus was lifted up upon that cross, He “drew all men” (meaning all kinds of men women and children from all parts of the world) to Himself. He didn't just die for the sins of the Jew and the Samaritan, He died for people of every tribe and tongue. And here we see it before us.

Here we see it: the beginning of Jesus` Church of the whole world, as Peter enters into Cornelius` house! Verse 28-29 “you are all aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. So when I was sent for I came without raising any objection.” You know, I think it is with good reason Peter says, “I came without making any objection”, because, let's be honest: it is our first inclination when anyone asks for something from us which is difficult, don't you think ? And if there was ever anyone who had a legitimate excuse to not help when asked, it was Peter here. This thing went against all of his past religious practises!

But friends, this too is how our own experience should be. God's Word overturns religion! Our traditions and history should never trump God's Word. Yes, if we were to place God's Word on the one hand, and our history, traditions, and wisdom of the world on the other hand, for the Christian there is no contest. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25: “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate. Where is the wiseman? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.” Yes, “for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.”

Brothers and sisters, I want you to notice the present continuous tense of these words: Christ's` Cross and His Gospel are the power of God to us “who are being saved.” We who are saved by grace through Jesus *are being* delivered through this life into heaven! Now, yes, we are saved but once, and yet our journey has not come to an end. There are daily trials, testings and tribulations for us, which yet remain in this life. So in that sense, we are “being saved.” God, Glory and heaven still await us! And in like manner, those who deny the existence of God or simply refuse to come to Him through His Son are in the process of going to hell! They either don't know it, or they deny the reality of it.

In effect, Peter has weighed up his religious traditions and the wisdom of those things, against the Word of God that has been spoken to him. And he will leave those things behind for the goal of

Jesus` Gospel. The souls which lay before him and are now staring him in the face! "I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?" which we will begin to examine next time!

But as I close this morning, I want to leave you with this question: As we peer into the very beginning of Jesus` World church, which we ourselves are part of today, what is it that is holding you back from giving yourself completely to Jesus and his Kingdom? Is it your family history? Is it your religious traditions? Or is it the recognised wisdom of the world? Beloved, whatever it is, (if indeed there is something which is holding you back), like Peter, you need to weigh those things up against the Word and the Promises of God which He has given us in the Bible! "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God."

Yes, "I came without raising any objection." My question is dear friends: will you?

Let's Pray.