

Telling God's Story

Thomas Robinson, January 23, 2011

Acts 10:24-48

²⁴ And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. ²⁶ But Peter lifted him up, saying, "*Stand up; I too am a man.*"

²⁷ And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. ²⁸ And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but *God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.*" ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then *why you sent for me?*"

³⁰ And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, *I was praying* in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing" ³¹ and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.' ³² *Send therefore to Joppa* and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' ³³ So *I sent for you* at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore *we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.*"

³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that *God shows no partiality,*" ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is *acceptable* to him.

³⁶ As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching *good news of peace through Jesus Christ* (he is *Lord of all*), ³⁷ you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: ³⁸ how *God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.* He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for *God was with him.* ³⁹ And *we are witnesses* of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem.

They *put him to death by hanging him on a tree,* ⁴⁰ but *God raised him on the third day* and made him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who had been *chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.* ⁴² And he *commanded us to preach to the people and to testify* that he is the one appointed by God to be *judge of the living and the dead.*

⁴³ To him all the *prophets bear witness* that everyone who *believes in him* receives *forgiveness of sins through his name.*"

⁴⁴ While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. ⁴⁵ And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God.

Then Peter declared, ⁴⁷ "*Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?*" ⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

God Changes Peter and Cornelius

Acts 10 is a great drama of turning. Luke shows us that here we can see especially clearly the dynamics that the proclamation of the Gospel – often unseen.

Both Peter and Cornelius thought that they were fine. Peter as leading apostle. Cornelius as a successful Roman who found the true God and lives with piety and goodness. They are not seeking God, but God is seeking them for conversion and growth.

Peter shows how God teaches and enlivens believers by the process of sharing faith and mentoring new believers. You don't know what you believe till you say it to someone else, identify with your faith, seek answers, live by it. God expands your vision, faith.

Everyone Needs Conversion

Cornelius was a good man – who needed to be born again (like Nicodemus, Paul, Ethiopian).

His morality and good deeds were not enough: “Send for Peter.” The Gospel is not about morality and good deeds – typical religion. It challenges their efficacy.

God chooses a really good man to break down the barrier to the Gentiles and show that all people are in the same sin, brokenness, need before God: “All have sinned” Rm 3:23. The Gospel begins where religion ends and God intervenes to create new situation – it requires turning around/conversion/being born again/seeing everything in new light – the “Good News of Peace through Jesus the Messiah who is Lord of the Universe.”

God's Story – Jesus' Story

Peter tells the story of Jesus as Trinity: God anoints Jesus with the Holy Spirit. A paradoxical story of power and deliverance from evil for others that moves to Jesus suffering evil from others and taking humanity's curse, the power of death (Dt 21:23). It continues in transformed physical resurrection – Jesus is hope and judge of all. It fulfills the story of scripture and ends human alienation from God because of sin. It is objective, real, true: “We ate and drank with him.” His story is my story.

Cornelius needs to enter a new relationship with God not on the claim of his goodness as though that could pay off his sins, but in the reality of his sin and brokenness, trusting what God has done in Jesus, creating peace. Leave delusion; gain reality.

Faith – Forgiveness – Holy Spirit – Baptism

Peter concludes with an emphasis on faith and forgiveness – knowing/trusting Jesus; receiving the impact of his work. But then Luke describes a remarkable intervention as the Holy Spirit comes. His usually invisible work here becomes manifest and stunning.

Their faith becomes manifest as they extoll/praise God. God's grace and work have become the center of who they are and the organizing center of their lives.

They speak in tongues as at Pentecost (Act. 11:15) showing that the Gospel and the Lordship of Jesus deals with the sin and brokenness and religion of all humanity.

All of this leads to the command that they must be baptized. No one can forbid them the gift that Jesus gave of allowing us to be plunged in water, into him, into his death and resurrection, into his identity, into his grace and receive his life – the Holy Spirit.