

Roy's sermon for February 21, 2021.

You Know! And The Good News

Last time in Acts we looked at v21-29 of chapter 10: 'The two visions come together: Salvation to the Gentiles!' We saw from v22 that Cornelius had all of the good stuff going for him: prayers, gifts to the poor, and indeed a Godly character. Yes, he had all of the good things because his faith was real! But one thing for eternal life he lacked, without which he and his household were destined for hell. And of course that one thing was Jesus! John14-6 "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except by me."

In verse 23 the servants stay at Simon's house overnight and head off with Peter the next day for Cornelius's house at Caesarea. Peter abided by the Holy Spirit's word "do not hesitate to go with the men", even though everything within his Jewish being was telling him otherwise. I explained that this is the kind of response we should all have to God's Word. If God has said it in the scriptures we accept it, and do all that we can to abide by it. We do not cherry pick His Truth; we abide by all of God's word!

Verse 24: Cornelius has called all of his family and friends together, even "a large gathering" we learned from verse 27. Verse 25: the 10 men arrive at Cornelius' house and he falls down at Peter's feet in reverence to the Apostle. But v26 Peter says, "get up I'm only a man myself." Yes, unlike many throughout Christendom today, Peter preached Christ not himself! No, he was no Pope with rings to kiss!

In 28 he explains why according to Jewish law he should not have come, but nonetheless after his vision he "came without any objection." This is where we pick up the account this morning: Acts 10:29-39 'You Know; And The Good News!'

Verse 29-31: "May I ask why you sent for me?" Cornelis answered, "Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said "Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor." Now brothers and sisters, I don't know if you notice but there is a very small, but very significant difference to the words of Cornelius here. In v4 of this chapter when the angel first appeared to Cornelius it says "Your prayer" plural. But here before us it says "Cornelius, God has heard your prayer" singular.

Why is this so significant, you ask? May I suggest, (and Matthew Henry concurs with me), that this particular prayer which God had sent His angel to answer had a very specific request within it. And the reason I say this is because of what Peter says in chapter 11:13-14 when he is explaining his actions to the Jews in Jerusalem. And we read, "he told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved." And since that day would go on to amount to what I explained would in effect be, the Gentile day of Pentecost so to speak), this prayer it would appear, was that Cornelius was asking God as we see them also ask in Acts chapter 2, "What must I do to be saved?"

Listen again to the words from Acts 2:36-37 "Therefore, let all of Israel be assured of this. God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. When the people heard this they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Can you see the clear parallels? The Jewish world on the day of Pentecost was "cut to the heart" when they were

confronted with the truth about Jesus. They had their Hebrew God-ordained religion and practises, and yet Jesus' Death and Resurrection had done away with all of those things. Yes they were confronted by Peter on the day of Pentecost with the truth about Jesus. Who He was. Who He is. Why He came. And what all of those things meant to the Jewish world! And those truths "separated bone from marrow", as the scripture puts it. The great crowd responds with "Brothers what shall we do?" And out of that great crowd "3000 souls are added to their number" Yes "what shall we do?"

Beloved, it is only when people are confronted with Jesus are they challenged and "cut to the heart" I have said it before, you will never socialise people into the Kingdom of God. Cornelius' "gifts to the poor" had risen up to God "as a memorial offering." But in the same way that those mercies, (those good deeds to the poor didn't save Cornelius), yes, in like manner, those things didn't save those people either. No, it is only when they are confronted with the Truth about Jesus are the souls of those captive to sin, set free! And friends it does seem that at this point, Cornelius with Jesus has indeed been confronted!

Verse 36 begins "You know"; verse 37 "You know." Brethren, it is interesting that Romans 11:19-20 tells us "since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." Yes, from Adam and Eve until Jesus, the whole of mankind has been "without excuse," because when we look at God's Creation it has been implanted in our very being, even in our DNA, that there is someone behind all of those things! That there is design. That there is harmony. That there is order. Yes that all of the pieces work and makes sense. They fit perfectly, because God has made them so.

Well, all of this being the case, we cannot escape the overwhelming truth, that this One who has made all of the pieces of the universe fit, has made us also, we are therefore then accountable to Him. We are indeed, "without excuse"! And yet may I suggest that since Jesus has come, we are even in a sense more accountable to God now. "To whom much is given will much be required," the Bible says. Yes, in His Son God has revealed much, much more of Himself! Colossians 1:15: "He is the image of the invisible God"; Colossians 1:19: "for God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him." Remember, Cornelius had done all of the good stuff and yet one thing he was eternally still lacking in. And that was Jesus! John 14:6 "I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the father except by me."

So verse 33 of our text "I sent for you immediately and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us." Brethren, just a few brief things from this verse. Firstly, having heard from God's Word through the angel, Cornelius didn't procrastinate, he didn't sit around pondering the things of the cosmos, no, he acted! Through every sermon that we hear when preachers come to us, if our hearts are prayerfully open, there will be some things, (perhaps even only one thing), that God is telling us. Satan wants to steal those things away from us, that's why taking notes is such a great idea. And when we hear those things, those seeds of God's Truth to us, we need to act upon them!

Secondly, it is good to encourage the Preacher. Ask them questions, perhaps even during the sermon if you're bold enough. Challenge them. Disagree with them. The faithful ones don't mind. They don't want you to tell them how wonderful they are, they just want to know that you are listening to them!

And finally, Matthew Henry makes a wonderful observation about this verse. Not only were they “all there” physically, but each one of them was also “all there” mind, body and soul! They had come ready to hear. They had come at Cornelius` invitation with him explaining that they were going to hear a message which was going to save their eternal souls. There was an eagerness in them. An anticipation that there will be something which was going to be eternally significant for them to hear. This was going to change their lives forever! Yes God was going to speak to them personally that day! So, they were “all here.”

Beloved, I wonder how often do each one of us come to worship that way? How often are we “all here”? Not thinking about what we'll be doing after the service or, ‘I don't like that song’ or, ‘I wish he'd hurry up and finish’, but that we “are all here,” Mind, body and Soul. With the anticipation that God is going to speak something personally to us today?

Well, as I said some weeks ago, finally it all becomes clear to Peter. Verse 34-35. It doesn't matter where you are from. Whether you be a Jew, a Samaritan, a Greek, an Ethiopian, a Roman soldier, an Australian, or any other nationality. We are all the same before God. Yes, we are equal before God. Equally condemned, and equally forgiven sinners! No, we are no different before God, because He “shows no favouritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.”

Friends we have come across this “fear of God” many times over the years. Well here we see it yet again before us. That reverent, respectful, awe. Even that holy love of God! Because He is God and we are not. He is infinite and we are not. He dwells in unapproachable light and we do not. His eyes pierce into the very souls of men and women and children, ours do not. Yes, that acknowledgement that He is God eternal, from everlasting to everlasting he is God and we are not. Exodus 3:14 “I AM WHO I AM.” It is not that wicked familiarity which so pervades Christianity today.

Peter continues this particular message which was so crucial to the Gentile believers. That message which the angel proclaimed would be for the Salvation of Cornelius and the whole of his household. And what was it? Well here it is before us. Further light. Further revelation. Yes further accountability by adding to God's revealing of Himself in His Creation. Look again at the words in v36 “You know”; and verse 37 “You know.” But what was it that they knew? John 21:25 “Jesus did many other things as well, if every one of them were written down I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.”

Friends, the evidence for Jesus Christ the man and what He did is overwhelming. Those things were not done in secret, or in some far off obscure part of the world where stories could be twisted and embellished, no. Those things were all done in and around the very centre of the Jewish universe. The Jewish historian Josephus, (a Jew and a non- Christian), wrote that Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, was attested to by miracles, was crucified by the Jewish rulers and authorities, and rose from the grave after three days! He was not a Bible commentator with Christian leanings. Nor was he a follower of Jesus or even a believer in Christ. He was a Jewish historian! He had nothing to gain by recording those things. And he was actually going against the falsehood, that the Jewish authorities had forced the guards who were on duty at the tomb of Jesus to spread. They were to report that “some of Jesus` disciples came and stole his body away.” So when Peter says to all of those gathered at Cornelius` house “You know” “You know,” he is saying that those things which have turned the world upside down over the past four years, concerning the man of God Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the Messiah, the Saviour, the very Son of God, (all of those things that He did and who He claimed to be, and why He came), Cornelius, and all of you who are gathered here, of these things you are fully aware. They have not been hidden from any of you! V36 “You know the message

of God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.”

Yes Beloved, if humanity was “without excuse” before Christ came, because God had always revealed Himself in His Creation through His common mercies, then how infinitely much more, are we “without excuse” since Jesus came and gave Himself as a ransom, that we might live! Yes, we too “know”; indeed the whole world today “knows”. We cannot claim ignorance, and even if we could as we all know, ignorance is no excuse for breaking the laws of men, let alone the laws of the God of the universe!

Friends, v36 tells us that Jesus brought us the “good news”. Brothers and sisters, what was that “good news”? Was it that you could have a trouble free life in Jesus? Was it that if you had enough faith you would never be sick? Was it that because of Jesus, financial, emotional, and spiritual problems would flee away? Well no. These things are not why Jesus came. And actually, often it is those very things which God uses to draw us to Himself through Jesus. No friends, “the good news” which Jesus brought was actually both “good” and yet also terrifying. It is good and indeed liberating for those who hear it and come to Him. But it is terrifying, for those who hear it and stand-off in the distance! Bad news brings distress. Bad news brings anguish, anxiety and frightening uncertainty.

Think of this wretched God-sent pandemic. Who hasn't at any stage over the past year watched the news on TV or listen to the radio for the latest cases and even deaths due to this virus? People are fearful. Afraid of what tomorrow might bring. Where will this invisible killer turn up next? Will I have my job tomorrow? If I go interstate, let alone overseas, will I be able to come home? If someone whom I love gets sick, will I even be able to see them before they die? These are all valid concerns in these uncertain times in which we live . There is so much bad news around today Beloved. What do we do, where do we turn?

Well Peter tells us. V36 “God sent the good news of peace through Jesus Christ”. Matthew 11:28-29: “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am humble and gentle of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Psalm 46:10 “Be still”, or better put “stop striving and know that I am God.”

Friends, Satan longs for us to fall into the abyss of wretched uncertainty. He longs for us to put our trust and hope in some vaccine or other. But brothers and sisters, these things are only temporary measures at best, because there will eventually be another pandemic. There will be another crisis and tragedy brought upon the world by God as long as men, women and children remain in rebellion from Him, and at enmity toward God. We will never find Heaven on earth. Because that great pandemic of which mankind is perishing at warp speed, and for which man will never find a vaccine let alone a cure, yes sin, takes every man, woman and child, apart from Jesus. It is the ultimate statistic. One from one dies!

Yes, “Come to me” “Stop striving”, “You will find rest for your souls” Cornelius; you and all of your family and friends who are gathered here, you have all heard about Jesus Christ. You have heard all about the things that He did. V37-39: “You know what has happened throughout Judea beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached. How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who are under the power of the devil because God was with him. We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem.”

Yes, Cornelius, you and all those here “know” Jesus wasn't just a man. No, He was no ordinary man. The things that you have all only heard about, we have seen with our own eyes. And I'm sure what

you have heard of is only but a fraction of the reality. Jesus and Jesus alone, has power and authority to deliver people from the claws of Satan!

Yes friends, "God has sent Jesus with the good news of peace." But it is not peace as some claim today. It is not the trouble-free existence which I mentioned earlier. Trials and strife still lie ahead for the believer. We still live in these bodies which are wearing out and have more and more aches and pains. We still live in this world of darkness, evil and uncertainty.

So what is this "peace" which Jesus speaks of? What is this "rest" which He spoke of? How can we cast that "burden" aside which is the "great tribulation" of this life? "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Cornelius my dear brother, the "peace" which Jesus brings is "peace with God." The burden of sin, which we are all born into through Adam, was rolled away at the Cross. "We are witnesses" of everything He did. Yes Jesus brings, "the good news of peace." It is "the good news", the amazing news that for the great pandemic of sin and sin's consequences, which is eternal death in hell, being cast out of God's presence for all eternity, Jesus has made a cure through the pouring out of His Own Blood. Though man has no vaccine, Jesus has the antidote. Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

Dear friends, as we find ourselves in Cornelius is house today, as it were, how much more could Peter have well said to us and our world today, "You know". Yes the whole world "knows", the whole world is "without excuse". Friends, as Peter opened the door to Cornelius' home, what lay beyond that door was in effect the whole world, of which you and I are a part. Yes, that whole world- wide church of believers who are Jesus' Body!

So with the truth about Jesus laid out before us, which Peter explains we all "know", the only question that remains is: Have you come in your heart to Jesus? Have you been dragged by God through His Grace and Mercy kicking and screaming to the foot of Christ's Cross? And in your mind's eye, have you beheld the holes in His hands and feet, The Crown of thorns upon His Head and looked around and realised that you are in the crowd who cried out "Jesus save yourself"? But then have you heard the words of the King, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do".

Yes friends, the only question which remains is this: Have you come? And if not, will you come, while there is yet time? Because the days are increasingly dark. And the season of His Mercy is coming to an end. So if you only know about Him, if you have only ever heard about Him, then I close with the words of the great reformer George Whitfield "Come to Jesus dear friend. Yes I say again, Come. Nay do not just come, run to Jesus, dear sinner, and He will set you free!"

Let's pray!