

## Thoughts for the week – 9<sup>th</sup> August

### **God's call – Acts 10**

In this account that Luke writes about there are two main human characters, Cornelius and Peter, brought together through the power of God, who probably would not have met other than by a divine intervention.

Cornelius was a God-fearing Gentile centurion in the Roman army whose Christian conversion we read in Acts 10. Despite being a Roman, he was a worshiper of God, who has rejected pagan Roman gods and is, known and respected by the Jewish community. He was a devout man who regularly prayed and gave to charity.

Peter had been steeped in the Jewish tradition of shunning Gentiles, however, he had met with Jesus and this had changed his life and was now obedient to serving God and spreading the Good News of Jesus. Peter realised, through his vision that God was creating something new.

The stage is set: you have a Gentile Roman soldier, representing the despised occupation of Israel, residing in the main city of the Roman occupation. Thirty miles south you have a Jewish apostle, temporarily residing at the spot where Jonah had taken off in disobedience to his commission to preach to Israel's enemy.

Behind the scenes, God is orchestrating the events to bring these two men together in a way that shocked both of them by breaking down the wall of prejudice between them.

The salvation of Cornelius and his whole household marks a key turning point in the early church's commission to spread the gospel 'to the ends of the earth' as Jesus commanded them to do.

The result of the story is that today you and I who are Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the church with the Jews.

*Ephesians 3 v 6.*

*This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.*

We have a Jew and a Gentile being brought together in order that salvation comes to a Gentile household. This comes about by them hearing God's call, responding to God's call and blessing others through God's call.

### **Hearing God's call**

In Cornelius's vision he instantly recognises that this is a visit from an Angel of God and addresses him as Lord and asks him what he wants. There were no questions like 'who are you' and certainly no fear or argument.

He listened and mentally noted all that the angel had said to him, so he could repeat it when sending his servants and a soldier to Joppa. The instructions were only given once.

In Peter's vision he did not react in the same way, as God needed to remove any prejudice. To prepare Peter to go to Cornelius' house, He gave him a vision of a sheet being lowered from heaven. In the sheet were all kinds of animals and insects and birds that the Old Testament forbade the Jews from eating.

Peter was hungry, waiting for his lunch. A voice said, "Arise, Peter, kill and eat." But Peter was shocked, as seen by his reply, "By no means Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean". He was putting up an argument against what he had been told to do.

Three times he was asked to eat and told that nothing is unclean that God has made clean. It is interesting how many occurrences in the bible where 'three times' is used with Peter.

## **Responding to God's call**

Cornelius immediately responds to what the Angel had told him and sent two of his servants and a devout soldier to Joppa to meet with the man named Peter.

There is an element of faith here that those he sent would be guided to the right house to meet the right man. The instructions were 'he is staying with Simon the Tanner who lives by the sea', even a satnav would have trouble finding the house. If God is involved then all things are possible.

Peter responds to the next call from the Spirit 'to go downstairs and go with these men as I have sent them' and does as he is instructed. He has learned the lesson given to him by God and welcomes these men into his house as guests.

Peter then goes with the men and takes with him some of the believers, I am sure he was prompted not to go alone, not for his own safety but for what God was going to do when he got there.

## **Blessing people through God's call**

Cornelius and Peter responded to the call of God and did as they were instructed. I am sure that as they travelled Peter and the other believers were praying and asking God to reveal to them what they needed to do and say once they arrived at Cornelius's house.

On arrival they were met by a large gathering of people, we are told that they were his relatives and close friends, Cornelius wanted everyone in his family and his friends to hear the good news that Peter was bringing. We all have family and friends that we want to hear the good news of Jesus either from us or someone else.

Peter speaks to the gathering and shares the gospel with them. As they respond to the gospel the Holy Spirit falls upon them and they start speaking in tongues. Then they were baptised and join the family of God's people.

Cornelius and his household were the first Gentiles to be taken into the Christian church, showing God intended for the church not to be just another sect of Judaism but something entirely new that would be for all the people on the earth.

When God is at work miracles happen, even today.

## **Application for us today**

1. We all are prone to prejudice.

Most people are prone to some sort of prejudice, maybe not the same as we have seen recently in the news about the events in America and the killing of an innocent black man by the police, but we still have some:

Other drivers who don't drive the way we want them to, people who are rude and selfish and lots of other things. We are probably blind to these prejudices until the Lord shocks us into seeing them. We are called to love one another and that includes our enemies and bad drivers, in my case.

2. God is involved in spreading the gospel

God was the prime force in this story. His purpose is to be glorified among all the nations, and he accomplishes that purpose by preparing both the hearers and his messengers. He revealed Himself to Cornelius, and just at the right moment, gave Peter the necessary vision to prepare him.

If we hear his call then we need to respond, even if we don't think we are qualified to do what he says. If God calls then he will equip, and because of our faithfulness we will be a blessing to others.

