

Sunday Morning Message

November 19, 2023

What God Hath Cleansed

Text – Acts 10; 11: 1 - 13

Congregational Reading – 11:5 - 9

Introduction

Last week we preached a message from Acts 1, and we gave a little overview and background on the Book of Acts. Today, we will be examining an account about one third of the way through the Book, which was the subject for our daily devotional reading yesterday and this morning. The story that I am referring to involves the conversion of a Gentile man, named Cornelius, in the City of Caesarea. The human vessel that God used to help Cornelius was Peter who at first was very reluctant to talk to the man because he was a Gentile. Peter had to learn that God's ways and ideas are often radically different from what he was used to. God was doing something new. The Nation of Israel had rejected their Messiah, so the Gospel message was now going to be opened to the Gentiles.

"11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not." (John 1:11)

Illustrate – The Parable of the Supper (Luke 14:16 – 24).

"25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." (Romans 11:25)

Transition

This morning, I am going to read through a rather lengthy passage of Scripture, and just making a few comments along the way, and then I will pull out some concluding thoughts.

I. The Vision of Cornelius (vs. 1 – 8)

v. 1 – centurion – a soldier that had charge over one hundred men. He was very powerful man within the Roman system.

"Italian Band" – Italian regiment, which consisted of 600 men.

v. 2 – This man was not saved, but he did have great love for God and His people. He helped them while many centurions persecuted them. Notice that he prayed to the God that he did not yet know personally.

Vs. 4 – 8 – Cornelius had a vision where an angel gives him instructions to go down along the Mediterranean coast to find Peter (See Map Below).

Notice that the angel told him that God was aware of what Cornelius had been doing and had heard his prayers. We often say that God does not hear the prayers of lost sinners, but here we see that He clearly did. God is not obligated to hear the prayers of anyone who regards iniquity in his heart (Psalm 66:18).

God did not save Cornelius because of his good works, but He did shew Cornelius salvation because of his tender heart toward God:

"23 Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God." (Psalm 50:23)



II. The Vision of Peter (vs. 9 – 16)

In Peter's vision, God three times used the illustration of unclean animals to convince Peter that He was about to make some changes in Peter's thinking. Under the Old Testament Law, the Jews were forbidden to eat what God called unclean animals, but here God says that these animals were no longer to be considered spiritually "unclean."

See Deuteronomy 14:3 – 21.

This vision was merely used for the greater purpose to illustrate to and convince Peter that the Gentiles who were once considered by the Jews to be unclean were now actually going to be included in the household of faith.

Paul discusses this "mystery" as well:

"11 Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; 12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: 13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; 15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in

ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; 16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: 17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. 18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. 19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." (Ephesians 2:11-22)

"1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, 2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: 3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, 4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) 5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; 6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: 7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. 8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; 9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: 10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, 11 According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: 12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. 13 Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory." (Ephesians 3:1-13)

III. The Visit from Cornelius' Men (Acts 10:17 – 23)

Peter was still pondering the meaning of the vision (trance) that he saw, when these men from Cornelius com to see him.

IV. Peter Preaches the Gospel to Cornelius and His Friends (vs. 24 – 48)

It all comes together once Peter hears the story of how God was working in Cornelius' life. Cornelius did not get saved because he was a good guy; he and the people with him were saved because they believed the Gospel.

Notice also that they were baptized after they were saved (vs. 47 – 49).

V. Peter Convinces the Brethren that God was Doing Something New (Acts 11:1 – 13)

Conclusion

There are a couple of things that I would like to pull from this passage.

1. **Peter was very reluctant to speak to this Gentile because of some presupposed ideas of God's attitude toward the Gentiles, which were wrong.** God had to convince Peter three times through the illustration of eating the unclean animals that it was OK for him to preach Christ to Cornelius. Peter was convinced that he was right, and it took a lot for God to convince him otherwise. I wonder if there are things in our lives that we are sure that we are right about that maybe God wants us to change our minds about.

2. **Even though God had convinced Peter that it was the will of God for Gentiles to be saved, there were still many within Peter's circle of friends who were not happy about what Peter had done.** Sometimes, it will take a while before other people recognize the will of God, but we must boldly stand against the crowd, if need be, and for what the Lord wants us to do.

Peter was still rehearsing this story in years to come:

"6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. 7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. 8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; 9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. 10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." (Acts 15:6-11)

3. **When Peter and the other disciples envisioned the Kingdom and what Jesus was going to do, they did not foresee what had actually happened.** The Romans were still in authority, the corrupt religious leaders were still in charge of Judaism, and now the door to salvation was opened to the Gentiles. This was not at all what the disciples expected (or wanted). Yet, God had other plans. Peter and the disciples had to abandon their ideas and accept God's will. God has a will for your life as well, which may be radically different than what you want. Let me remind you that God's ways are not only higher than our ways, but they are also much better.

4. **The further away from God this world becomes, the more difficult it will be to keep our church this perfect little museum for the saints.** It has always been a hospital for sinners, but the lost sinners that God calls us to love and reach today with the Gospel, are more spiritually sick than ever before. We cannot be like Peter and his friends were initially. We must be accepting to these folks. We must love them for the Lord and try to reach them with the Gospel. Note – that does not mean that we must be accepting of their sin. We still need to preach the righteousness of the Lord.

5. **The further away from the God this world becomes, the less we will be able to relate to people on the outside.** We are going to need to work extra hard at loving them, praying for them, and trying to communicate to them their need for Christ.