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## Why Cornelius? Why a Soldier? (Part II)

**Acts 10:22:** (NASB) *They said, Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well-spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you.*



A few weeks ago we began to tell the story of the dramatic events that led up to the conversion of the centurion Cornelius to Christianity. Because the expansion of Christianity to Gentiles was such a radical shift in God's methods, radical measures had to be taken! Today we will finish the story and see how its conclusion would change the history of Christian faith by the inclusion of you and me!

There is an underlying theme of change and how to prepare ourselves for change.

(Please refer to "Why Cornelius? Why a Soldier? (Part I)" from May 17, 2015.)

Let's quickly review Part I: What about Cornelius? **He had four clear descriptive traits:** Acts 10:1-2: (NRSV) *'In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. <sup>2</sup>He was **a devout man** who **feared** (revered) **God with all his household**; he **gave alms generously to the people** and **prayed constantly to God.***

How did God move Cornelius? He was a Gentile and was therefore outside of God's favor. How did God get his attention enough to get him to do something radical?

**Let him know he had been noticed and blessed!** Acts 10:3-4

**You instruct him and then you watch:** Acts 10:7-8

**Meanwhile, back at Simon the tanner's house...**Acts 10:9-16

**As Peter is thinking and no doubt praying about this, the answer arrives:** Acts 10:17-18:

Once again the precise timing of God in the unfolding of His plan would bring clarity at the proper time. Peter was allowed to struggle with this revelation to help it sink in - to help him absorb the radical change which was to take place...and now answers were arriving!

Acts 10:19-20: We see more precise timing and reassurance:

- God's Spirit communicated with Peter through a three-part command: Rise, kill and eat! That command was given three times.
- Three men were looking for him and yet another three-part command is given: Arise, get off the roof and go with them! Have no doubts!

Here we have some of the most amazing lessons of these remarkable events for both Cornelius and Peter. They have not yet met, nor has the main purpose of their visions come to pass; yet both were given profound insight into God's care, foresight, timing and plan! They were thoroughly prepared for what was about to happen.

**Because God knows and executes His plan, His promises and care are never short:**

Isaiah 65:23-24

**He guides and teaches those who truly rely upon Him:** Psalms 25:9: (NRSV) *He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble His way.* Peter and Cornelius were both chosen for this mission because they had the humility to accept God.

**He pays close attention to those who seek Him:** Psalms 32:8: (NRSV) *I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.* God will watch and give us counsel. What an amazing promise! Acts 10:21-22: Cornelius' men quickly and accurately described him and the message he was given. They were imminently respectful of Peter - true messengers! Acts 10:23: Think about the unusual event here - *Romans* going to seek out the *Jewish* Christian Peter. Peter hears their story and immediately, without thought, gives them lodging! Peter is fearlessly breaking new ground because he sees God's hand in it. What a powerful lesson!

Both parties react with great confidence and anticipation at this meeting, for everyone knows that the answers to the visions and the future are before them - all they must do is to stay obedient.

There is a lot of detail to this story in the preparation phase. We see that Peter's heart is exactly in the right place by hosting these people overnight.



**Cornelius shows his heartfelt anticipation by gathering family and friends:** Acts 10:24-26: THIS is the answer to, “Why Cornelius?” Observe the actions here: Cornelius must have previously witnessed to God’s goodness as expressed through the Jewish Law to all friends and family in his home. Even without outward proof of God’s presence and blessing in his life, he was not deterred in his worship and praise. His immediate response is humility! He loved God with all of his heart and shared with those around him.

**Although the following text refers to idolatrous Jews, the same principles apply in drawing them back to God as in the drawing of Cornelius to God:** Isaiah 30:18-22: (NASB) <sup>18</sup>Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; How blessed are all those who long for Him. <sup>19</sup>O people in Zion, inhabitant in Jerusalem, you will weep no longer. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry, when He hears it, He will answer you. The magnitude of God’s character shines - He wants us to long for Him. He shows us why we need Him. For Cornelius, the wait was time “well-devoted” and he enhanced his life. <sup>20</sup>Although the Lord has given you bread of privation and water of oppression, He, your Teacher will no longer hide Himself, but your eyes will behold your Teacher. <sup>21</sup>Your ears will hear a word behind you, this is the way, walk in it, whenever you turn to the right or to the left. <sup>22</sup>And you will defile your graven images overlaid with silver, and your molten images plated with gold. You will scatter them as an impure thing, and say to them, be gone! The end result is abandonment of the gods of our lives and the embracing of the God of all life. We sacrifice our interests to do God’s will. Cornelius and the Apostle Peter had both put away their own interests. Now these two honorable men meet.

**Peter shows his humility by keeping perspective:** Acts 10:27-29: This statement of fact reveals the act of faith taking place. Remember, Peter housed Cornelius’ servants the previous night! Peter’s vision was truly having its effect! ...and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. <sup>29</sup>That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me? Peter now sees clearly - the vision was in triplicate, the unclean animals, the Law and the time for change, all at the command of God. He now understands the import of the vision as being much more than meat. He here has a large ready-made audience to witness the Gospel to and yet he does not assume anything, rather he respectfully asks for direction. This is important because we know Peter’s reputation for being impetuous in the past. Here he is humbly following the instructions of God and being blessed for doing so. He tells the “unclean” people that all men are acceptable in God’s sight, so he knows why he is here and now asks Cornelius to explain his side of the story.

**What have we observed so far?**

- VISION: All players in this drama seem focused on the higher purpose of this experience.
- HUMILITY: Peter and Cornelius are models of acquiescence!
- COURAGE: Peter steps out of the constraints of the Law with bold confidence in God’s will.
- ENTHUSIASTIC EXPECTATION: Cornelius gathers those closest to him to be taught of God.

**There is a prophecy of this very witness experience at the birth of Jesus:** Luke 2:25-32

Remember, Peter asked why Cornelius called for him. He is asking Cornelius to reflect - to go back and recount all the pieces of the puzzle from Cornelius’ vantage point. **Cornelius assumes nothing and recounts his experience:** Acts 10:30-33

**Observations:**

- Cornelius is precise in his recounting indicating the impact this experience had upon him.
- He stresses the urgency he felt.
- He acknowledges Peter’s honorable response.
- He doesn’t ask questions - he simply positions his household to listen fully.

**Another Old Testament Prophecy that foreshadowed this moment:** Isaiah 42:6-7



To truly listen to the true Gospel is a sign of a true heart! Proverbs 9:9-10: (NASB) **So, all becomes quiet as Cornelius, his household, his friends and those six Jewish Christians who accompanied Peter wait for the Apostle’s godly words: Acts 10:34-35**

**It is very different from what had been:** Amos 3:3: (NASB) *You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.*

**Peter continues by summing up the earthly ministry of Jesus the man:** Acts 10:36-39: (NASB) <sup>36</sup>*The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)* <sup>37</sup>*you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed.* <sup>38</sup>*You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.* <sup>39</sup>*We are witnesses of all the things he did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put him to death by hanging him on a cross. Peter establishes that he and his brethren personally witnessed these events of Jesus and observed the glory of his life.* <sup>40</sup>*God raised him up on the third day and granted that he become visible,* <sup>41</sup>*not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with him after he arose from the dead. Again, the confirmation of the eyewitnesses who were there - this time of Jesus the spiritual being.* <sup>42</sup>*And he ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the one who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.* <sup>43</sup>*Of him all the prophets bear witness that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins. Now Peter confirms their responsibility to represent Jesus as judge, forgiver of sins and the promised seed. So, the words that everyone waited for firmly established that Jesus as Messiah and Lord was being revealed to them through Peter and his brethren, and that Cornelius and his brethren were invited to be a part of that representation of Christ! This was a transferring of responsibility of what believing in Jesus means. It is not an emotional response that makes you feel good. It is a dramatic change in your dedication and the way you live.*

**The finale of the experience - the evidence of God’s favor overflows out onto the Gentiles:** Acts 10:44-48: (NASB) <sup>44</sup>*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.* <sup>45</sup>*All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.* <sup>46</sup>*For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God...God showers His influence on the Gentiles! If there was any doubt, it was gone now. They were all to fully embrace this new change. ...Then Peter answered,* <sup>47</sup>*Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?* <sup>48</sup>*And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.*

**Great faith in God and great patience towards God are rewarded with great favor from God!** 2 Timothy 2:19

**What have we observed so far?**

- **MUTUAL RESPECT:** Neither Peter or Cornelius vies to claim any position -they both simply want truth.
- **THANKFULNESS:** Thankful receipt of God’s direction. Both recognize and follow God’s clear direction.
- **PROPHECY FULFILLED:** Peter is privileged to open a door that God had long ago foretold.
- **MIRACULOUS CONFIRMATION:** The pouring out of God’s Spirit left no doubt!
- **EXPANDED BROTHERHOOD:** The Gentiles are baptized into Christ.

**The immediate reaction of the other Jews who followed Christ:** Acts 11:1-18: Generations of tradition and following the Law needed to be educated.

The Jewish Christians had to go through this experience. They could not argue with it.

<sup>4</sup>*But Peter began speaking and proceeded to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying,* <sup>5</sup>*I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky; and it came right down to me... <sup>9</sup>But a voice from heaven answered a second time, what God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy...*



Peter was not defensive. He describes the vision as a clear but puzzling message from heaven. <sup>11</sup>And behold, at that moment three men appeared at the house in which we were staying, having been sent to me from Caesarea. <sup>12</sup>The Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings. These six brethren also went with me and we entered the man's house. <sup>13</sup>And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house...Peter describes a clear but still puzzling direction from God's Spirit. <sup>15</sup>And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as... upon us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup>And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he used to say, John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. <sup>17</sup>Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as he gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way? Now a crystal clear conclusion from the entire experience God had provided. When something changes and is different, those of us who do not understand will typically react just like these people did. The Apostle does not get rattled because he had proof and credibility of the experience. <sup>18</sup>When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life. This is a great start for what would prove to be a rocky path.

Why a Roman centurion? This man had the discipline of a soldier, the track record of responsible behavior, was educated and had a mighty heart for God. Such a man of pagan background being called to be the first non-Jewish follower of Christ surely shows us the magnitude of God's love and mercy towards ALL! He was a dedicated man of faith long before he was brought to Christianity. What faith he had!

Romans 8:31: (NASB) *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?*

This would begin a new era of Christianity. It would be an era of growth and faithfulness as well as trial and difficulty.

***So, why Cornelius? Why a soldier?  
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!***