

Peter and Cornelius

(Acts 10:1-22)

Pre-Session Warm Up

[Teacher, discuss prejudice with your students.] Throughout history people have shown prejudice (partiality or favoritism) toward different groups of people. Can you give me an example of this?

Prejudice hurts people and it was never God's plan for anyone to look down on another group of people based on race, color, age, education, social class, wealth or anything else.

God does not have a favorite group of people or a less favorite group of people. He tells us in His word to love others as we love ourselves.

In our Bible lesson today, we are going to hear how God began to remove a barrier of prejudice that His people, the Jews, held against another group of people for centuries.

Opening Prayer

Father, we are so thankful that You do not show favoritism. Reveal to each of us today if we have any forms of prejudice in our hearts. Cleanse our minds from this sinful thinking. We want our lives to be pleasing to You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Then Peter replied, "I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right. (Acts 10:34-35)

Lesson

Open your Bible, to Acts 10.

Acts 10:1-2

In Caesarea there lived a Roman army officer named Cornelius, who was a captain of the Italian Regiment. (2) He was a devout, God-fearing man, as was everyone in his household. He gave generously to the poor and prayed regularly to God.

What do we learn about Cornelius from this passage?

[Teacher notes: a *centurion* is a commander in charge of up to 100 men. A *regiment* is a battalion of about 6,000 men. Centurions were chosen because they had noble character.]

Cornelius was not a Jew; he was a Gentile. (A Gentile is anyone that is not a Jew.) We are told he was a God-fearing man, gave generously to the poor, and prayed regularly. So, we know he lived a righteous life. But he had not heard the Good News that Jesus died on the cross for His sins.

Do you know that you can live a good life, go to church, pray and even help others, but still not be saved? To be saved, you must have faith in what Jesus did on the cross to pay for your sins.

Titus 3:4-7 [Teacher, have a student look up this verse.]

But—When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, (5) he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. (6) He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. (7) Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.

One day God spoke to Cornelius by sending an angel to speak to him while he was in prayer.

Acts 10:3-6

One afternoon about three o'clock, he had a vision in which he saw an angel of God coming toward him. "Cornelius!" the angel said. (4) Cornelius stared at him in terror. "What is it, sir?" he asked the angel. And the angel replied, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering! (5) Now send some men to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter. (6) He is staying with Simon, a tanner who lives near the seashore."

Even though Cornelius was not a believer, God was watching his life and He heard his prayers.

God wants everyone to be saved, so He sent some angels to speak to Cornelius. God wanted Cornelius to send for Peter.

Acts 10:7-8

As soon as the angel was gone, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier, one of his personal attendants. (8) He told them what had happened and sent them off to Joppa.

Cornelius obeyed God right away and sent for Peter. God was also preparing Peter to meet with this Gentile.

You see, a devout Jew like Peter would never consider stepping into a Gentile's home, but this was God's plan.

The Israelites were God's chosen people. God had chosen them to be the ones to bring the Messiah, Jesus, into world. First God chose Abraham and told him to leave his home in Ur. Then God promised that He would give him the Promised Land and make his family into a great nation, more numerous than all the stars of the sky. God also promised Abraham that from his family line, the Savior would be born.

Later God gave His chosen people, the law with rules to follow to help them live their lives in a way that pleased Him. He wanted His chosen people to keep themselves pure and right. He wanted them to show the rest of the people in the world the way to live their lives.

The Jews knew that God wanted them to live a "set apart" life – different from the Gentiles. One of the ways that the Jews were different than the Gentiles was in the foods they were allowed to eat. For example, Jews were not permitted to eat anything that came from a pig such as bacon or pork chops.

God's plan was for the Jews was to be an example to the Gentiles. But the traditions of the Jews carried this beyond what God intended.

It was not permitted for Jews to have anything to do with Gentiles. They were not to enter their homes or eat with them. But that wasn't God's intention. He simply wanted the Jews to be an example to the Gentiles to show them that God wants all people to live "set apart" lives.

Anyway, God had to do a work in Peter's heart to prepare him for the job He had called Peter to do. So, God gave Peter an amazing vision:

Acts 10:9-14

The next day as Cornelius's messengers were nearing the town, Peter went up on the flat roof to pray. It was about noon, (10) and he was hungry. But while a meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. (11) He saw the sky open, and something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners. (12) In the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds. (13) Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat them." (14) "No, Lord," Peter declared. "I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean."

Peter was a devout Jew who followed God's laws and had never eaten any "unclean" animal. He didn't understand God's instructions because he didn't fully understand God's plan to bring the Good News to the Gentiles so they could be saved.

Acts 10:15-16

But the voice spoke again: "Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean." (16) The same vision was repeated three times. Then the sheet was suddenly pulled up to heaven.

God gave this message to Peter three times and it was very confusing to him. So, he sat and thought about this message; he was trying to figure out what God was saying to him.

Acts 10:17-18

Peter was very perplexed. What could the vision mean? Just then the men sent by Cornelius found Simon's house. Standing outside the gate, (18) they asked if a man named Simon Peter was staying there.

While Peter was thinking about the vision God gave him, Cornelius' men arrived at the gate where Peter was staying.

Acts 10:19

Meanwhile, as Peter was puzzling over the vision, the Holy Spirit said to him, "Three men have come looking for you."

The Holy Spirit told Peter that three men were looking for him and that he needed to go see them immediately.

Acts 10:20-21

Get up, go downstairs, and go with them without hesitation. Don't worry, for I have sent them." (21) So Peter went down and said, "I'm the man you are looking for. Why have you come?"

Peter obeyed God and went to greet the three men.

Acts 10:22

They said, "We were sent by Cornelius, a Roman officer. He is a devout and God-fearing man, well respected by all the Jews. A holy angel instructed him to summon you to his house so that he can hear your message."

Peter may not have fully understood what God was telling him to do but he obeyed.

There is a lesson here for us, too. You may not understand why God is asking you to do something, but you must trust that He has a reason and a purpose. For example, God may ask you to be a friend to someone at school or in your neighborhood that no one else likes. But God wants you to shine your life before them so that they will get to know Him.

Let me summarize what happened when Peter obeyed God.

Peter went to Cornelius' home. By entering the home of a Gentile, Peter was going against the customs and traditions of Israel, but not against God's word.

Acts 10:28

Peter told them, "You know it is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with you. But God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean."

Cornelius was waiting for them to come which showed that he had faith in God. When Peter got there, he explained to Peter why he sent for him. (Vs 30-33)

Then Peter told Cornelius and his household that God wants all people to come into His family of believers. Peter told them that Jesus had come into the world to save all sinners, not just the Jews.

Acts 10:34-36 [Our verse for today!]

Then Peter replied, "I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. (35) In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right. (36) This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all."

It had been God's plan all along that everyone in the whole world would come to know Him. He had only chosen the family line of Abraham to lead people to faith in Him.

While Peter was still speaking, salvation came to each of these Gentiles as they believed in their hearts that Jesus was truly the Savior of the whole world.

Acts 10:44

Even as Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the message.

God promised Abraham, and his descendants, that the blessing that came through him would extend to all nations (Gen 12:1-4).

Acts 10:47-48

"Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?" (48) So he gave orders for

them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Afterward Cornelius asked him to stay with them for several days.

We have learned a couple of important lessons today. First, we have learned that even good people, who are respectful towards God, still need to come to Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and put all their trust in who Jesus is and what He has done for them. When we started this lesson, Cornelius was a good man, but he had not yet come to faith in what Jesus did for him on the cross.

Second, we learned that God has no favorites. The Jews thought because they were God's chosen people, that they were the only ones God wanted to save. They didn't understand what they were chosen for. God wanted them to go into the world and not just tell people about God's ways, but to show them how to live a set-apart life.

How about you? Do you live in such a way that people can get to know God better? Do they want to know God because they see the fruit of the Spirit in your life? Let's pray.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, we want to live our lives in a way that pleases you with every thought, word and action. Please fill us with the Holy Spirit and give us a desire and the boldness to share the Good News with everyone we meet about what You came to do for us on the cross. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

GAME CENTER

Use the following questions in a game or discussion of your choice:

1. What is the name of the God-fearing man in our lesson this today? (Cornelius)

2. What did the angel say to Cornelius in the vision God gave him? (Vs 4-5. *"Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering! Now send some men to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter."*)
3. Who was Peter staying with in Joppa? (Vs 6. He was staying with Simon, a tanner who lives near the seashore.)
4. What time did Peter go up on the roof to pray? (Vs 9. Noon)
5. What did Peter say when he had the dream about eating unclean animals? (Vs 14. *"I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean."*)
6. How many times did God give Peter the same vision? (Vs 16. Three.)
7. Who was looking for Peter? (Vs 19. Three men.)
8. What did the three men say to Peter? (Vs 22. *"We were sent by Cornelius, a Roman officer. He is a devout and God-fearing man, well respected by all the Jews. A holy angel instructed him to summon you to his house so that he can hear your message."*)
9. Cornelius was a good man. Why do you think it was hard for Peter to enter Cornelius' home? (Vs 28. It was against the law for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home or to associate with a Gentile.)
10. Why was Peter willing to go into Cornelius' home if it was against the law? (Vs 28. God had shown him that he should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean.)
11. What happened while Peter was telling Cornelius and his household the Good News? (Vs 44. The Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the message.)

12. What did all these Gentiles do when they believed in Jesus? (Vs 48. They were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.)

