

Peter's message to Cornelius
Acts 10:30-11:18

Introduction

We are going to look in detail at the message Peter preached to Cornelius and the large expectant congregation he had gathered at his house. Luke described the message by a term he was very fond of – “the Word of God” (Acts 11:1). The term the Word, the Word of God, the Word of His grace, the Word of the Gospel, the Word of this salvation, is used elsewhere. We read of the Word being preached, causing increase, being heard, being sent, being received and being taught. This reminds us that the Christian Gospel is not men's opinion, thought up and devised. But it is from God; it is His message and His revelation. We either accept what God says or we do not. We are not deciding about men's opinions, but the Word and revelation of God.

Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us (Acts 10:33). What is this Word which God has spoken, which the preacher is required to be faithful to, and which the congregation must **accept not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe** (1 Thessalonians 2:13)?

The subject of the Word

Cornelius was a God-fearing and righteous man who knew his Old Testament, respected the commandments and attended the Synagogue. Yet he had an urgent need to know about Christ. He had received the preliminaries but he needed to know God had finally and fully revealed Himself in Jesus Christ His Son.

God's Word is His message to man, centred on Christ, not just His teaching and instruction but in Christ His very self. Paul told the Corinthians **I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified** (1 Corinthians 2:2). This was the theme of all the other Apostles, recorded in Acts. Even the writer to the Hebrews began this way: **In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son** (Hebrew 1:1,2). God's Word centres on Christ, His life, death, resurrection and return. He not only spoke the Word, but His very life was the embodiment of the Word.

This is what authentic preaching ought to do also. “We preach Him always” (Luther). “I went into the town and offered them Christ” (Wesley). In Peter's sermon, he makes the point that God speaks to men in the three offices of Christ – as Lord, Saviour and Judge.

(a) As Lord of all. **You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all** (Acts 10:36). **God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ** (Acts 2:36). Stephen saw Him at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55,56). **All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me** (Matthew 28:18). **God placed all things under**

his feet (Ephesians 1:22). **He who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him** (1 Peter 3:22).

God had called out a people for His name, summoning them to bow the knee, worship and adore, submit to His authority and control. So men and women yielded their lives to Him, not only as individuals but also in the home – we often read of whole families coming to Christ. Today some people have a reminder in their house: “Christ is the head of this house; the unseen guest at every meal; the silent listener to every conversation.” Believers gather in His name, bringing praise and worship and love and loyalty.

But the mass of men goes their own way. They treat Him as of no account. **'We don't want this man to be our king.'** (Luke 19:14). But days of rebellion are limited. The day is coming when that Lordship and authority will be acknowledged everywhere. **At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father** (Philippians 2:10,11).

(b) As Saviour. Jesus' saving work began in His ministry. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, and went around doing good, healing and releasing men from darkness, doubt and despair. **They killed him by hanging him on a tree** (Acts 10:39).

The word “tree” is used 5 times in the New Testament, of which 3 are used by Peter, (Acts 5:30; 10:9; 1 Peter 2:24) and 2 by Paul (Philippians 13:29; Galatians 3:13). **Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse** (Deuteronomy 21:23). Why was Jesus cursed by God? Because the transfer of sin and its penalty had been laid on Him. **Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."** (Galatians 3:13). So when we sing of the “*cruel tree*”, “*accursed tree*”, or “*For you and for me He prayed on the tree*”, the hymn writers are not just using poetic imagination. Here is a clear reference to Christ bearing our sins and bearing our curse.

Then at once Peter hastens on to say God raised Him from the dead on the third day. God showed Him to the specially chosen witnesses who ate and drank with Him. It was a physical resurrection, guaranteed by witnesses. They were not just in touch with Christ's spirit, but they saw the same body that was wounded on the Cross, now alive with new glory and new powers. So Christ was a Saviour in His ministry and especially in His death, confirmed by resurrection. “There is no salvation from sin unless there is a living Saviour. But the living one is Saviour only because He died” (Denney)

(c) As Judge. **He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead** (Acts 10:42). He is Saviour in the present, Lord in the present, but Judge in the future at His Second Coming. To Him all will give account. The One who died to be Saviour is coming back to judge – how appropriate. We will go before Him, either as one of His children, saved by grace, and we will go on serving Him in His presence. Or we will go before Him as one spurning God's word in His Son, turning our back on salvation, rejecting His living risen presence.

If we have excluded God from our earthly lives, He will exclude us from His presence in eternity. We will all face judgement, we can be sure of it. We will either hear “Come you, blessed of my Father” or “Depart from me you cursed” (Matthew 25:34,41). We will all be judged and all face one of those two verdicts.

So here is God’s word to us. He has spoken finally and decisively in His Son, in His Lordship, Saviour-hood and in His being Judge. Great issues of life and death, of heaven and hell, submission and rebellion, forgiveness and condemnation, are at stake.

The blessings of the Word

The response to the Word produced very positive results.

(a) Peace. (Acts 10:36). But are we sure what that means? Imagine two countries at war. Peace means end of hostilities and violence. This would have been the Greek view of peace. But Peter was a Jew and Cornelius was a Gentile. The Hebrew conception of peace was very positive. It meant prosperity for the whole man, a warm personal relationship with God, rest of the soul, security and well-being, fullness of blessing.

Peace with God means being in a right relationship with Him. The peace of God is abundant and indescribable. It is able to guard heart and rule in our lives. It enables a man to say, “I expect to win my battle against cancer, but no matter how it goes I’m at peace with God. I can’t lose.”

(b) Forgiveness of sins. (Acts 10:43). Because of the Cross, our past is not held against us. There is a new covenant: **For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more** (Jeremiah 31:34). Remember how John Bunyan portrayed it in his *Pilgrim’s Progress*. As Christian came up to the Cross, his burden came loose from his shoulders, fell off his back, tumbled down the hill and fell into the mouth of the tomb and was seen no more. Later Christian gave three leaps of joy, singing, “Blest Cross! Blest Sepulchre! Blest rather be the man that there was put to shame for me!”

(c) The gift of the Holy Spirit. **While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message** (Acts 10:44). Thank God that grace does not just deal with the past, but makes ample provision for the new life. There is a new occupant in the life. All becomes new. The whole of Christian life experience righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. New life animated, guided, filled, controlled, strengthened, gifted, empowered, and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. **If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ** (Romans 8:9).

Response to the Word

The response to the word Peter preached was threefold, and involved a change in attitude of the heart, submission to ordinance and change in direction of life.

(a) Faith. It is not enough to know these truths that He is Lord of all, Saviour and Judge, in our minds and intellect. These truths must be appropriated, trusted, surrendered to. And this response cannot just be a flash in the pan – the first acts must lead to continuity. $\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$ literally translates “keep on believing” (Acts 10:43).

*“Jesus, the first and last,
On Thee my soul is cast.”*

(b) Baptism. When the Holy Spirit was poured out, there was speaking with tongues, and then the request: **Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water?** (Acts 10:47). In the New Testament, faith was publicly expressed in baptism. Inward faith was shown in the outward ordinance. We saw this at Pentecost, and the Ethiopian eunuch, Saul, Lydia, and here, Cornelius, and later, the Philippian jailer. Baptism is done in His name, on His command, professing faith in Him, out of obedience to Him, signifying union with Him. To remain unbaptised is an incomplete response to the Gospel. It is not meant to be an optional extra, but something the Lord commands in response to the Gospel.

(c) Continuance. Peter was asked to stay for a few days to give further instruction and share more fellowship. Conversion and baptism was not the end of the road, but the beginning of the road. The early church placed such an emphasis on growth and continuance with the Lord. They were not just counting heads and rubbing their hands at success. The Apostles sought, wherever they went, to **strengthen the disciples and encourage them to remain true to the faith** (Acts 14:22). Barnabas, for example, went to **Antioch and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts** (Acts 11:23). Continuance was most important.

Conclusion

The Word of God – God’s message to us. He wants us to know His Son is Lord of all, Saviour and Judge. He wants to give us the blessings of peace of soul, forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Our response to that message ought to be faith, baptism and continuance.

Let us all enlarge our view of Christ and had deep enjoyment of His salvation. Let us respond to Him in the appointed way.