

Text: Acts 10.17-48  
St Stephen's

Nov 17<sup>th</sup>, 2007  
Sat/Sun

## Doors Open Wide

We are working through the Book of Acts, and are in Chapter 10. From Chapter 1 at the resurrection of Jesus to chapter 10 **covers about 6 years**. You never notice that as you read, but it does. During those 6 years we have seen thousands of people come to faith in Christ. What is even more stunning is that over the next 300 years, the Christian faith would sweep the Roman empire. Just sweep it.

When you look at the tremendous impact of Christianity you have to ask, **how did this happen?** It happened through **the power of God to convert people**.

**Conversion means 'turn around'**. Change. Become something different. When a **caterpillar gets converted**, it becomes a butterfly. And that's what Christianity does. It makes people **new** and **different**.

**For a month** we have been focusing on three conversion stories in Acts... they are case studies...

- Ch 8 The conversion of a African eunuch
- Ch 9 The conversion of Saul who became St Paul
- Ch 10 The conversion of a Gentile roman soldier

We meet **Cornelius** (Bill introduced you to him last week)

*At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.*

Acts 10:1-2 (NIV)

Cornelius was a soldier, **a company commander**. But unlike most of the Roman soldiers who were part of the occupying force in Israel, he was **devout** towards God and **generous** towards those in need. He was a man of **prayer** and a man of **compassion**. He is **a great guy**.

Let's take a look at how Cornelius was converted and learn a bit more about conversion...

## 1) God Takes the Lead in Conversion

If you read the story too quickly, you might think that **Peter led Cornelius to faith** in Christ. But that is not at all the real story. Let's sketch it out... Here are **the main events**...

- **God sent an Angel to Cornelius...**

*One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"*

Acts 10:3 (NIV)

Your prayer is heard! Send for Peter in Joppa (30 miles away)

- **God sent a vision to Peter**

*About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray... He saw heaven opened...*

Acts 10:9,11 (NIV)

3 times a sheet let down, filled with non-kosher animals "Rise, kill, eat"

- **The Holy Spirit spoke to Peter**

*While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."*

Acts 10:19-20 (NIV)

So he goes...

- **Peter and Cornelius Meet**

*The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence.*

Acts 10:24-25 (NIV)

Peter picks him up and begins to speak to him about Jesus...

- **While Peter was Preaching, the Holy Spirit fell**

*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.*

Acts 10:43-45 (NIV)

**Who converted Cornelius?** There is no getting around it; God is the main actor on the stage. That is true of every conversion. **God always takes the lead.** God has looked for you, loved you, longed for you, sought you **long before** you ever thought of him. God loved us long before we thought of him.

Think of it like this... There is a **sign over the doorway to his Kingdom:** Standing on the outside, you look and it says "*whoever will may come...*" The doors are open. By simple faith in Jesus, you come through. **You think it is you** that has made this decision, made this choice, come to believe.

Then you are **inside for a while.** And your life begins to change. And maybe you go through some struggles and doubts. One day you see the doorway again. But now you are looking at it from the inside. And as you look up, you notice that over the door on the inside is written a different sentence, "*You did not choose me, but I chose you...*" And you realize that **it was him all along.** "Salvation is of the Lord."

He has been looking for you far longer than you have been looking for him. You can search with confidence. Seek and you will find...

## **2) Conversion Is For Everyone**

Angel to Cornelius: '*you are a great guy.*' And he is! '*Therefore you need to be converted.*' This is **not the way we think.** We think people on skid row need to be born again. But not Cornelius.

The **average person thinks being born again is a call to become moral, to traditional values and traditional religion.** But look at Paul, Lydia, Cornelius, Nicodemus. Their call to conversion is not a call to traditional morality. There were **already very moral, very religious.**

The Bible says that **the problem with the human race** is that **people put themselves in the place of God**. There are **two ways** to do this. One way is to **break all the rules** because you think you know better than God how to run your own life and your little world. You make yourself your own God. The other way is to **keep all the rules** and conclude that God owes you. You have earned and God owes. Again you put yourself in the place of God. **Either way can get you lost.**

Everyone **needs a savior**. Bad people need to be converted. Good people need to be converted. Cornelius needed to be converted. After Cornelius was converted **what did he have** that he didn't have before? He had forgiveness and mercy. He had the Holy Spirit like a river!! He had a new life, an eternal life. It was **pure gain**.

**No one is so moral, so religious, so close to God** that they do not need his grace and mercy.

**No one is so broken, so messed up, so far from God** as to be beyond his grace and mercy.

**Conversion is for everyone.** I asked two weeks ago, **are you converted?**

### 3) Conversion Goes On

*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.*

Acts 10:25-26,28 (NLT)

**This is a story about Cornelius' conversion.** But this is also a story about **Peter's conversion**.

Now Peter had **already been converted**. True. 6 years earlier he clearly was. But God wasn't done with him. There was **a cancer in his heart**. You and I would call it **racial prejudice**.

**Many Jews** were like Peter in this. They knew that **God had chosen**

their nation, and they twisted that into **racial and national pride** that **looked down** with disdain on all the other nations. '**Gentile dogs**' was their phrase. That racial prejudice was a cancer. Six years after his own conversion at the events of Jesus' death and resurrection, **God is removing the cancer** from Peter's heart.

Remember how when Peter came into Cornelius' house after great hesitation? God had to show him the vision 3 times. Then God had to speak directly to him by his Spirit, 'do not hesitate to go with them'. Then God had to pour out the Spirit upon them right in front of Peter. And Peter was astonished. Stunned! **Peter was learning** that no human being is to be rejected as though he was unclean.

**Conversion goes on** in your life. It isn't a momentary thing that fades into your past. It probes deeper and deeper. Sometimes, maybe **6 years down the road**, you find that **there is this cancer** in your heart. Maybe it is racial prejudice. Cultural pride. Maybe it is something unforgiven. Someone unreleased to God. You **look down** on other people. You have this **distain**. This **hatred**. This **anger**.

What you will find, is that **God will orchestrate** the events of your life to push your conversion deeper and deeper, until your heart is just like his. The question is, **will you say 'yes'** to that ongoing conversion? Peter did.

Maybe there is a conversion moment like that at hand for you today...

#### **4) Conversion Happens When You Get a Clear Look at Jesus**

*"Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."*

*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.*

Acts 10:43-45 (NIV)

When Peter stepped into Cornelius' home, there were dozens of people

there – friends, relatives, all eager to hear. Peter began to talk about Jesus.

- He talked about **how Jesus lived** a life of compassion and wisdom. How he healed so many, delivered so many. I can just sense the **heartbeats** in the room quickening...
- He went on to talk about **how he died** a cursed death, 'on a tree'. Peter means by that that Jesus took the curse that we deserved. The **heartbeats** in the room are picking up pace...
- He went on to say that **God raised him**. And we saw him. We ate and drank with him... (pass the ketchup...) The **heartbeats** in the room are going faster...
- Then he said that Jesus will be the one who will **judge the nations**... The **heartbeats** in the room are thumping...
- Finally he came to this phrase: *Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.* **Everyone** who believes. Jew. Gentile. Near and far.

Like Paul on the road to Damascus, **Cornelius was face to face with Jesus**. Everything else faded away. Everything else drops away. It is **just you and Jesus**. **Right there Cornelius just said, 'yes'...** "Me too..." That's what I want... forgiveness. A new life. I want you, Jesus.

It is the moment when you know, **'no, I am not good enough.** It is not even close. I have really screwed things up. I have this cancer eating away at me.

And right there when you know **you are so much worse** than you have ever admitted that you are, and you know that **you are much more loved** than you ever dared to dream, and there you are, face to face.

And you know that **it is him you've been looking for.** And you yield to him. You give over to him. You come home to him.

Forgiven and free and filled and loved. And everything changes. A caterpillar is becoming a butterfly.

**Prayer Cards...**