

**Sermon Notes of
Pastor Craig Kuhlman's Sermon on December 20, 2020:**

**"Transformation of the Early Church Series on
The Book of Acts – The Radical Advance of a Radical Gospel [Part 2]
(Acts 9:32 – 11:18) (Part 11)"**

Forth Sunday of Advent – Love

[In today's sermon, Pastor Craig Kuhlman on Zoom shows us from the writing of Luke about how God was transforming Peter by showing him, through Cornelius, a Roman centurion, that all people, including Gentiles, were granted eternal life when they accept Jesus.]

Introduction:

- Advent is all about Jesus' coming.
- Now we know that Jesus is no longer here physically, but He is here spiritually through the actions of people who have been motivated by Him.
- Jesus extends His love through us.
- Now in the book of Acts, Luke gives us hallmarks of identifiers about what love is all about, what loves means, how we extend the love of Jesus and how generosity is about the Christmas season that we are in.

Overview – #1 was what we covered last week

1. Peter's ministry is authenticated (Acts 9:32-43)
 - a. Both miracles followed the example of Jesus
 - b. Both miracles were performed by the power of Jesus
 - c. Both miracles were signs of the salvation of Jesus
 - d. Both miracles rebounded to the glory of Jesus
 - In the book of Acts, healing was a method that God used to witness His Son Jesus to others.
 - Today, star athletes, musicians and Hollywood star performers provide a witness to Jesus through their personal stories and life examples.
 - Now, we know that God does heal us today for those of us seek healing, but it's not the main method God uses to witness to others.

Overview – this is what we will cover today:

2. Cornelius sends for Peter (Acts 10:1-8)
3. Peter receives a vision (verses 9-23)
4. Peter preaches to Cornelius' household (verses 23-48)
5. Peter defends his actions to his own people (Acts 11:1-18)

Acts 10:1 (NIV), At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. 2) He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.

- “Give generously” is phrase or a marker of Luke that shows a new people or household of God.
- We are now showing this happening in the Gentile world.
- The phrase “giving generously” should make us pause, because it is a hall marker of love doe those who are believers.
- So, Cornelius was not your average individual at that time because he prayed regularly to God and gave generously to those in need.

3) 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!” 4) Cornelius stared at him in fear. “What is it, Lord?” he asked. The angel answered, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. 5) Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. 6) He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.”

7) When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. 8) He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

- Prayer is our means to communicate with God and how He interacts with us.
- It’s obvious that the Holy Spirit was working with these the two servants and this particular soldier – that’s why Cornelius chose them.

9) About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10) He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11) He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12) It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. 13) Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

- Here God tells Peter to do something Peter thought God had always told them NOT to do.
- These animals represented people who Peter thought were unclean.
- Gentiles were treated like unclean animals to the Jews.
- So, today we have to ask ourselves, “Are there any groups of people that we consider unclean and won’t interact with them?”

14) “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” 15) The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

- God has made all people “clean” – reconciled and restored through His Son Jesus.

16) This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven. 17) While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by

Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. 18) They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

19) While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. 20) So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." 21) Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

22) The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." 23) Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. 24) The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

- Before, Peter accepted Simon, the tanner, was a ceremonially unclean person and now it's three Gentiles that Peter invited into his home.
- We can see that God is slowly helping Peter understand the fine points of the New Covenant.
- Luke shows us through the book of Acts how Peter is being slowly transformed.

25) As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. 26) But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself." 27) While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. 28) He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.

- Are there people that seem impure or unclean that we might back away from?
- It's so easy to do. When we do that, we don't show love.
- Pastor Craig recently saw a video about a church that was inviting a new pastor to come in and lead them.
- So, on the Sunday he was to come, the congregation had a new level of expectancy to meet their new pastor.
- Now, interestingly, a homeless man with a beard, dressed in ragged clothing came into their church and the ushers immediately placed him in the back pew.
- Members ignored him and didn't extend a handshake.
- And when services started, the new pastor hadn't come on stage yet.
- Then this homeless man slowly walked up to the front of the church and said, "I'm your new pastor."
- He then took off the fake beard and removed his old clothing.
- And this brought about a dramatic change in the members as they saw homeless people differently.
- So, when we call anyone impure or unclean, we're not extending love to those whom Jesus has extended His love to.

- That is purpose of this day of Advent – to show love and to be generous in our hearts and to be generous to share the resources we have.

29) So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

- So, Peter is starting to get it, as he could see God dealing with him through a vision.

30) Cornelius answered: "Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me 31) and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. 32) Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' 33) So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

- The power of prayer – God dramatically showed up.
- God had given them a spirit of expectancy.
- They wanted to know what God had to say to them through Peter.
- Now notice the message of the gospel didn't come through an angel, but as Peter described himself, "an ordinary man."
- And today, the message of the gospel comes to others through us as ordinary people.

34) Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35) but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. 36) You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. 37) You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – 38) how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

39) "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, 40) but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. 41) He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

42) 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. 43) All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." 44) While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.

- This passage is often referred to as "the Pentecost of the Gentiles".
- That's because just as the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost and landed on the Jewish people, now we're seeing the same thing happen here with this Gentile family.

45) The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles.

- This was a true act of witness to the Jews to see “the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles.”

46) For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, 47) “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.”

- Now, when the Holy Spirit was given to those in Samaria, they were baptized first before the Holy Spirit came upon them.
- Now, here in Joppa, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them before they were baptized.

48) So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

- There’s nothing magical about being baptized, but it’s a sign of becoming a part of God’s family.

Acts 11:1, The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. 2) So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him 3) and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

- The Jews, being a chosen people, thought they were so special to God and no one else was.
- And so the Jerusalem Jewish Christians criticized Peter, because of their lack of understanding.
- So, Peter started to explain to them what happened.

4) Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: 5 “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. 6) I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. 7) Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’ 8) “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

9) “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ 10) This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again. 11) “Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. 12) The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house.

13) He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. 14) He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’ 15) “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning.

16) Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?" 18) When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life."

- Those of us believing in Jesus have a new life now that defines itself eternally, which is a life that extends forever, even though our physical life does not.
- When the Holy Spirit removed the scales from our eyes and we became believers in Jesus, we obtained that eternal life.

Poetic Summary of today's message: (Let's say this together):

*The gospel advances in a radical Way,
According to plan we might Say.
Through miracles of healing good news was Spread,
As two arise, one from a mat, and one who was Dead.*

*Now Peter begins to Understand,
God doesn't show favoritism, no respecter of Man.
As Peter prayed at noon and became hungry to Eat,
He was given a vision of unclean Meat.*

*But Peter resisted at the thought of Unclean,
Not knowing it was Gentiles that God did Mean.
Then Peter was told they were down at the Gate,
Three men from Cornelius did Await.*

*Cornelius had gathered his relatives and Friends,
To hear the gospel from Peter, and the one God Sends.
Peter explained through the law Gentiles were Forbidden,
But now he sees Grace and acceptance has Overridden.*

*So as Peter preached to this household of All,
Upon each one, the Holy Spirit did Fall.
Peter called for their baptism in Jesus as a sign of Grace,
Seeing that the Spirit was provided to the entire Race.*

*Now back in Jerusalem the Apostles had Heard,
How the Gentiles had received and accepted the Word.
At first criticized for breaking the Law,
Peter explained how the Spirit had brought him to Awe.*

*At this they rested and their objections now Cease.
Seeing how God changed Peter and brought about Peace.
At this they all gave God their Praise,
And dismissed the questions Peter's actions did Raise.*

Communion (Frank Guice):

- Opening prayer:

*Father in heaven, our glorious God, thank you for all things. Bless our greater understanding of and participation in communion. In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.*

- Communion is about sharing and exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings mental and spiritual.
- Today we are observing the fourth candle of Advent – love, another virtue leading us to Christ.
- What compelled Jesus to come here to earth and save us?

John 3:16, For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

- Love is all about love for others as Jesus commanded Peter that if he loved him, then Peter would feed His lambs (John 21:17).
- Paul wrote in Colossians 3:14 that the virtue of love binds us together in perfect unity.
- While humanity has a focus on things in the temporal world, God looks on the intent of hearts that are desiring Jesus' Second Coming and the future of the surviving faithful.
- And we say, "Amen, come!"
- Now, as we take the bread and wine, we are showing Jesus' death until He comes.
- So, let us take together the bread, which represents His body broken for us.
- Likewise, let's take together the drink in the cup representing His blood that was shed for us.

Closing prayer: