

Stretching Faith (Part 2)

Acts 10:24-43

Let me remind you that the verses we just read follow on the heels of what we learned last week; namely that they teaches us not only about the Gentile named Cornelius coming to faith; but also, and perhaps more pointedly, that these verses teach us about Peter's stretching of faith, coming to learn that God's heart is not simply to save the Jews, but to save people from every tongue, tribe and nation. The application we made from verses 1-23 was this; *we must guard ourselves against any attitudes that see sharing the gospel with someone as beneath us because we might regard them as unworthy, unloving, or unapproachable.* This is how Peter had considered Gentiles, as just almost beyond the grace of God. But as we noted, God taught Peter a lesson by way of a vision that we are now going to see put into action in our text.

Let us divide verses 24-48 into three sections. The first will cover verses 24-33 where we see Cornelius as a hungry hearer; then verses 34-43 where we will see Peter as a potent preacher; and finally from verses 44-48 where we see Spirit-filled saints. From the example of these two men, we will also make two main applications.

I. A Hungry Hearer (10:24-33)

24 On the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man." 27 As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled. 28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.

29 "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." 30 Cornelius said, "Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments, 31 and he said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. 32 'Therefore send to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea.' 33 "So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

Did you notice the fervent and persistent zeal of Cornelius to hear the truth. He wanted to hear the gospel. He wanted to know Jesus Christ and to that end, he went to great lengths to come to know the truth about Jesus. As so, as we begin to look at these verses, let me make this observation and application; *those whom God draws to Himself, He infuses with a fervent hunger for knowing the truth. A characteristic of one within whom God is at work, is a voracious appetite for the Word of God.* We have already noted in verses 1-23 the providence of God to bring Cornelius and Peter together for this encounter; so let us now see how what God instilled in Cornelius that brought him to this situation. There are three notable things here.

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

A. Preparation (10:24)

First, notice that when God infuses a hunger for knowing the truth, there is accompanied with it a heart of preparation; a desire to be prepared in order to receive the fullness of the truth. In verse 24, we find that Cornelius was “waiting” for Peter and his companions. The word “waiting” here means to be in either hopeful or fearful anticipation. It is an active watching, looking and thoughtful anticipation of what is to come to pass. Peter would use this word three times in 2 Peter 3:11-14, verses that give us this feeling of a hopeful, purposeful and intent longing for something to come to pass. Having just spoken on the judgment that is to come upon the earth, we read:

11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! 13 But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. 14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless...

Here in 2 Peter 3, the point is to be in a state of prepared anticipation of the coming of the Lord. In Acts 10, Peter found Cornelius in a prepared state of anticipation with regard to hearing the truth of the gospel. This is all a reminder to us that all within whom God is at work and thus have a voracious hunger for the Word ought to find themselves waiting, in prepared anticipation to hear the Word of God preached. The puritan preacher, Thomas Watson noted:

When we come to the Word preached, we come to a matter of the highest importance; therefore we should stir up ourselves and hear with the greatest devotion.

That is what Cornelius had done, he had stirred up himself to hear the word and then notice that he also “called” – that is called out and called together family and friends to hear the word preached. Not only had Cornelius prepared himself, but also he sought to get others prepared to hear the word. This attitude of preparation was granted to Cornelius by God and I dare say that some of us need to pray that we would be granted a fresh desire to be as prepared to hear the word of God.

B. Humility (10:25-29)

Second, not only was Cornelius prepared, but part of his preparation was to hear the word with humility. In verse 25 we see him falling at the feet of Peter and worshipping him. Obviously he was wrong in practice by worshipping Peter; and Peter quickly corrects this practice. However, the attitude was not wrong and is rather remarkable. This Gentile Centurion, a well-respected and influential man, humbled himself before the preacher that the preacher would know how sincere was his desire to learn. We speak of how much disregard the Jews had for the Gentiles...well, Roman Centurions were generally known for the love and respect of the Jews either. Cornelius knew he did not know all that he needed to know or could know and humble sought to learn. Do you come to learn with humility? Do you long to spend time with and speak to those whom you know – know more than you about Jesus and the Word of God? I recently

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found myself in a situation where a person was struggling with knowing and applying Biblical principles to some difficult circumstances in his life. This person knows by both my practice and by my understanding the Word that I have knowledge to share and I offered myself to that end; yet to do so would require much humility on his part, something that he lacks in this matter; and so there is a resistance and separation. Beloved, let us not find ourselves too proud to ask for help; to say to one another, particularly as it relates to knowing and practicing God’s Word, “I don’t know understand or I don’t know what this means, can you help me?”

In verses 27-29, we find that this humility works both ways; for both the hungry hearer as well as for the potent preacher. We will look at this a bit more in just a moment, but notice how Peter reveals his own humility in immediately submitting to God’s Word rather than to his cultural norms. Jewish thought taught Peter to avoid Gentiles and even here Peter says in verse 28 that it would be “unlawful” for a Jew to associate with a Gentile. This is not the law of God, but it was the law of Peter’s cultural upbringing. Peter shares in verses 28-29 what God had taught him, that he was not to regard Cornelius, or any person, as beyond salvation and that the believer’s responsibility is not to make people conform to Christian standards before they can be saved, because that is not possible, but rather we are to share the gospel and allow the Holy Spirit to use the Word of God to change the heart of an unbeliever. Both Cornelius and Peter were humble when it came to wanting to know as well as in making known the truth.

C. Obedience (10:30-33)

The third and final characteristic that God infused into Cornelius as seen in our text is that of obedience; obedience – of hearing, understanding and then doing what God has commanded. In verses 30-33, Cornelius gives his own testimony of what God had done in his life, how his own prayers for knowing truth were being answered. But as is often the case with knowing the will of God; with the knowing comes responsibility; that knowing God’s will also means doing God’s will. Verses 32-33 show us how both Cornelius and Peter immediately obedient the revealed will of God. Cornelius was commanded to send for Peter; and Peter was commanded to go to Cornelius. Notice what Cornelius says in verse 34 about Peter’s coming, saying, “and you have been kind enough to come” – as if this were all about Peter’s graciousness. But you might note the marginal reading in the NASB text, which might fit the context better saying, “and you have done well in coming.” In other words, Cornelius sees Peter’s coming as having done the will of God well. So we have Peter expressing his willingness to preach God’s Word to Cornelius and his guests; and we see on Cornelius’s part an eager anticipation. Beloved, the hungry had gathered to hear the Word; and this is always true of those within whom God is working. So let me ask you, how hungry are you? The evidence that God is actively at work in you is when you have an unquenchable thirst for the living waters and the bread of life. For *those whom God draws to Himself, He infuses with a fervent hunger for knowing the truth. A characteristic of one within whom God is at work, is a voracious appetite for the Word of God.*

I find it no small thing that Peter, the same Peter we find in our Acts text wrote these words in 1 Peter 2:2-3 saying,

...like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it [the Word] you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

To put this way: if you have tasted the kindness, the mercy, the grace of the Lord, then long (presently, currently, and fervently) for the milk of the word. And as a baby starts with just a few ounces; that slowly turns into many ounces; that turns into solid foods until that baby grows up to be like me; nearly two hundred pounds of pure eating machine...you can't stop me from eating food; and, in like manner, you can't stop me from taking in the Word of God. I am, and want to be a hungry hearer! How about you? Does this describe you?

II. A Potent Preacher (10:34-43)

34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. 36 “The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) — 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 38 “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. 39 “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. 40 “God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, 41 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. 42 “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. 43 “Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

Having just seen in Cornelius the truth that *those whom God draws to Himself, He infuses with a fervent hunger for knowing the truth. A characteristic of one within whom God is at work, is a voracious appetite for the Word of God;* we are next presented with Peter as the potent, that is the effective, effectual and obedient preacher. And the truth that I would have you key in on from these verses is this; *those whom God draws to Himself, He infuses with a fervent desire to make the truth known.* As soon as Peter arrives and surveys the scene, we find him immediately giving a testimony. This testimony can be broken down into two parts; first we see Peter's own personal testimony of what God had been teaching him in verses 34-36 and then this will be followed by Peter's testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ in verses 37-43. In other words, when we have opportunity to speak to others about Jesus, it is good to tell them how God has been working in our own life along with the basic truths of the gospel message.

A. The Testimony of Peter (10:34-36)

First, we have the testimony of Peter in verses 34-36. As Peter comes to this moment to preach the gospel to Cornelius and his friends, let us remember that Peter has already experienced his own personal transformation by the power of God's Word. According to verse 34, Peter had been taught and convinced by God that the gospel message was to be preached to all kinds of people, Jews, gentiles, free men or slaves, males or females. One of the lessons here is what we noted last week, that the first qualification of a Christian witness is a willingness to speak the gospel to anyone to whom you may be sent along with a desire to welcome as brothers and sisters believers from every race, tongue or tribe.

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In verse 34, Peter says that he understands “that God is not one to show partiality” – Peter had come to learn that while God is most assuredly indifferent and hostile of religions that oppose His truth, He is not indifferent of nations, of people all kinds of people. Notice in verse 35 that Peter had come to learn that **“in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.”** That word “welcome” – means “to be marked out for favor.” The point being made is that a non-Jews would not have to become Jews in order to be saved, for God has already marked them out for His favor.

And let us understand verse 35 for it might sound like it is teaching salvation by works, but it is not, for the person who fears God and does what is right, this is simply the indication that God is at work in his heart; this is the evidence that this person has been marked by God for divine grace. The point is, when a person hungers for God and for truth, it is the welcome time for salvation. Beloved, all whom God is seeking will be saved and the fruit of God’s seeking will be evident. Sometimes we can be too skeptical when unbelievers show signs of life. We conclude they are putting on a show; or working for their salvation. Let us encourage them and pray that these are simply the seeds and sprouts of the new birth!

This message of the inclusiveness of God to reach the nations with salvation that Peter is coming to understand began with and in Israel, according to verse 36, and was culminated in the person of Jesus Christ. Then Peter says, “He is Lord of all...”. Beloved, this is Peter’s testimony, Peter’s saying, “I get it now! For I had always thought that salvation was only for the Jews and whoever became Jewish; but Jesus is Lord of all!” The “all” here clearly referring not to every single person without exception, but rather to “all kinds of people regardless of race.” This literally reads, “He is of all; Lord” Not only is Jesus Lord of Israel, even though most of Israel did not acknowledge Him as such but a small yet grown number of Jews; but Jesus is also Lord of “all kinds of people” – again, even though most Gentile did not acknowledge Him as such, yet a small and growing number of those from every tribe and tongue and nation were coming to Him as Lord. Not only is Jesus the Prince of believing Israel; but He is also the Potentate of believing Gentiles. This was Peter’s personal testimony.

B. Testimony of the Gospel (10:37-43)

Beginning in verse 37, Peter walks through the key points of the gospel message itself. Let me quickly walk you through these key points of a good gospel presentation as our own testimony of the gospel needs to include these things. First, in verses 37-38, Peter speaks of the Person of Christ. Jesus is the anointed, the chosen one of God as spoken by the prophets of Old. Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit and with power. This leads to Peter’s speaking of the work of Christ. In the middle of verse 38-39 we see that Jesus went about as God’s Chosen and in the power of the Spirit **“doing good and healing all who were opposed by the devil...”**

This work of Jesus was not limited to just doing general good and healings for the people; for in verses 39-41 we see one of the most crucial elements of the gospel, the death and resurrection of Jesus. Notice that in verse 39 it is clear that Jesus was put to death; then in verse 40, it is clear that God raised Him from the dead “on the third day” – meaning just as Jesus Himself proclaimed. It was a visible, bodily resurrection according to verse 40; not that Jesus was raised in spirit and that His body is still rotting in a cave, but He was presented alive. Then Jesus was seen by a number of people “chosen beforehand by God” – first the apostles and then a number of other followers. Then, finally, in verse 42 we see that this gospel message is to be

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preached, or proclaimed and all to the end to call people to a response, asking them in effect, who do you say that Jesus is? Beloved, this is the essence of the gospel. I would have you note with me that the apostle Paul picks up on this very content of the gospel over in 1 Corinthians 15:3-11. There we read:

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, [the Person and Work of Christ] 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. [those who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead] 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. [Paul's person testimony] 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. [proclamation and response].

Whether it be Paul or Peter, the truth of the matter is this, *those whom God draws to Himself, He infuses with a fervent desire to make the truth known.* This was true for both of these men and it is true of every believer who is walking in a manner worthy of the gospel. Peter was a potent, an effective proclaimer of the gospel because God had infused him with the hunger for the truth and a hunger to make the truth know. Beloved, we ought to hunger for the truth; hunger to hear it and then hunger to share it. Is this true for you?

III. Spirit-Filled Saints (10:44-48)

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. 45 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. 46 For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, 47 "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" 48 And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

This chapter closes with the hungry hearers, having heard the message from the potent preacher, becoming Spirit-filled saints. To Peter and his companions' surprise, the apostle to the Jews had just been used by God to irreversibly open the door of salvation to the Gentiles!

What we read in these verses is the marvelous manifestation of the reality of salvation among these Gentiles. It opens us to this third truth; *those whom God draws to Himself, He indwells with His Spirit giving them a fervent passion to exalt God with their lives.*

In order to prove to Peter that salvation has truly come to the Gentiles, God allows Peter to see what happened to him and the apostles on the day of Pentecost, back in Acts 2, to happen now to the Gentiles. Just as the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples in Acts 2 resulting them speaking in tongues, which, by the way, as always known languages and was always for the express purpose of speaking of the mighty deeds of God, these Gentile believers were filled with the Spirit even as the message was being spoken and notice in verse 46 what happened; the

The Church Alive

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Gentiles were speaking in tongue. And what were they speaking, they were speaking those things that exalted God.

Peter was so amazed and so clearly understood that salvation had come to these Gentiles that he has them baptized in verses 47-48. This is not insignificant as what Peter witnesses and does here is about to spark a controversy in the church that will brew all the way up to Acts 15 where the question will be asked, "What must the Gentiles do to be saved? Do they have to become Jews first?" Of course we know Peter's stance. Look back up at verse 43 where Peter said,

"Of Him [Jesus] all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

Peter said, "***everyone who believes in Him...***" not everyone who becomes Jewish; or obeys the law of Moses, but rather everyone who simply believes that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners and acknowledges that Jesus came to save him from his own sin and to empower him to live for God. For salvation has always been by grace alone, though faith alone, by Christ alone.

So as we close, let me remind you of the three truths we have been exposed to this morning. First, *those whom God draws to Himself, He infuses with a fervent hunger for knowing the truth. And a characteristic of one within whom God is at work, is a voracious appetite for the Word of God.* Are you hungry for the word of God? Second, *those whom God draws to Himself, He infuses with a fervent desire to make the truth known.* Do you desire to make God's truth known? And finally, *those whom God draws to Himself, He indwells with His Spirit giving them a fervent passion to exalt God with their lives.* Do you have a passion to live for Jesus by means of the Spirit of God?

Soli Deo Gloria

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