

I.N.I.

First Sunday after Epiphany
January 13, 2019
Acts 10:34-38

In Christ Jesus, who is Lord and Savior of all, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

All three Scripture lessons for this morning show the Epiphany theme: Jesus, the Christ is both true God and true Man, the Savior of all people. In our Old Testament reading we heard a direct prophecy of the Messiah, called the "chosen One" in whom God delights. We are told the Messiah does not confine His saving activity to Israel only, but "to the nations...and the coastlands...as a light to the Gentiles."

In our Gospel reading we heard of Jesus' Baptism which clearly showed Jesus as Immanuel, "God with us", come in human flesh to redeem all of mankind. He fulfilled all righteousness identifying with the sinners He came to save.

And in our sermon text we see the Epiphany message being put into practice as Peter is led to take the Gospel message of Jesus to the Gentile Centurion named Cornelius.

Most of us know the background to this text. Two weeks ago in our Bible Class on Galatians we heard of this lesson of Peter and the sheet of all kinds of animals. Peter was up on the porch roof praying, waiting for dinner when he fell into a trance and saw a large sheet filled with **ALL KINDS OF FOUR-FOOTED ANIMALS OF THE EARTH, WILD BEASTS, CREEPING THINGS, AND BIRDS OF THE AIR** coming down from heaven.

A voice from heaven declared: **"RISE, PETER; KILL AND EAT."**

Remember what Peter said? **"NOT SO, LORD! FOR I HAVE NEVER EATEN ANYTHING COMMON OR UNCLEAN."**

To which God replied: **"WHAT GOD HAS CLEANSED YOU MUST NOT CALL COMMON."**

This happened three times. While Peter was pondering on what all of this meant the Lord again said to him: **"BEHOLD, THREE MEN ARE SEEKING YOU. ARISE THEREFORE, GO DOWN AND GO WITH THEM, DOUBTING NOTHING; FOR I HAVE SENT THEM."**

This vision and God's words taught Peter that one should no longer live under the Old Testament rules and regulations. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant who kept all these rules and ceremonies, regulations and precepts and therefore He has set them aside.

Having learned this, Peter went into this Gentile's home, which was forbidden according to Old Testament rules and he said to Cornelius and his family: **"YOU KNOW HOW UNLAWFUL IT IS FOR A JEWISH MAN TO KEEP COMPANY WITH OR GO TO ONE OF ANOTHER NATION. BUT GOD HAS SHOWN ME THAT I SHOULD NOT CALL ANY MAN COMMON OR UNCLEAN. THEREFORE I CAME WITHOUT OBJECTION AS SOON AS I WAS SENT FOR. I ASK, THEN, FOR WHAT REASON HAVE YOU SENT FOR ME?"**

Cornelius responded by telling Peter that a few days earlier when he was praying an angel had appeared to him and told him to send men to Joppa and ask for Peter to come and speak to him. Cornelius then added: **"SO I SENT TO YOU IMMEDIATELY, AND YOU HAVE DONE WELL TO COME. NOW THEREFORE, WE ARE ALL PRESENT BEFORE GOD, TO HEAR ALL THE THINGS COMMANDED YOU BY GOD."**

Peters' words from our text this morning show that he learned that
JESUS IS THE LORD OF ALL

Peter's first point is:

I: Jesus' invitation of Grace is offered to all.

Peter said: **"IN TRUTH I PERCEIVE THAT GOD SHOWS NO PARTIALITY. BUT IN EVERY NATION WHOEVER FEARS HIM AND WORKS RIGHTEOUSNESS IS ACCEPTED BY HIM."**

Peter learned that God shows no favoritism. He cannot be bribed. He does not deal with people on the basis of their nationality, race, color, or the following of certain rules and regulations. This is what many Jews believed. They were proud of being Abraham's descendants and felt that this

physical descent alone would bring them the acceptance and favor of God. Also keeping Old Testament rules and regulations would make God look upon them with favor or be partial to them.

But God's Word is very clear. He is concerned with the heart of the individual. And what does He see in everyone's heart by nature? Nothing but sin and death! Everyone's heart is totally corrupt. Dead in sins! Human beings are enemies of God because of their transgressions. Mankind is the object of God's wrath and condemnation. No one can do anything to make God either feel sorry for them or make them acceptable to God and earn His favor. That includes all of us here this morning! What can you or I ever do to make us acceptable to God? Our hearts and minds are filled with sins of thought and desire. We deserve His wrath and condemnation.

But how then can Peter say: **BUT IN EVERY NATION WHOEVER FEARS HIM AND WORKS RIGHTEOUSNESS IS ACCEPTED BY HIM**? Sounds pretty work-righteous!

Only the grace of God in Jesus makes one acceptable to God. To "fear God and work righteousness" is the *work of God in us*, not by us. You see, God accepts the one in whom the Holy Spirit has worked; the one who in sincere sorrow repents of his sin, acknowledges his lost condition, and turns to Jesus in faith, trusting in Jesus' sacrificial, substitutionary death and resurrection for forgiveness, and clings to Him alone for salvation. Only through faith in Jesus does one have his sins removed from God's sight, making him acceptable to the Heavenly Father.

Such saving faith will then naturally show itself in fruits of faith. By the power of the Holy Spirit working within our heart, we will live according to God's will, by avoiding sin and working righteousness. This is simply the natural response of a grateful heart, praising God for His grace. And this invitation of grace is offered to all—Jew and Gentile alike!

Peter continued:

II: Jesus has earned Peace with God for all.

Cornelius and his family knew about the Jehovah God. They believed in the coming Messiah. They were Gentile converts who also knew somewhat about Jesus. Peter said: **"THE WORD WHICH GOD SENT TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, PREACHING PEACE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST -- HE IS LORD OF ALL -- THAT WORD YOU KNOW."**

Through Cornelius' study of the Old Testament prophesies he and his family knew of the coming Messiah. They no doubt heard about the miracles and teachings of Jesus, and about the peace He said He would bring. We do not know if they knew the whole story, for Peter goes on in the words after our text saying: **"AND WE ARE WITNESSES OF ALL THINGS WHICH HE DID BOTH IN THE LAND OF THE JEWS AND IN JERUSALEM, WHOM THEY KILLED BY HANGING ON A TREE. HIM GOD RAISED UP ON THE THIRD DAY, AND SHOWED HIM OPENLY, NOT TO ALL THE PEOPLE, BUT TO WITNESSES CHOSEN BEFORE BY GOD, EVEN TO US WHO ATE AND DRANK WITH HIM AFTER HE AROSE FROM THE DEAD. AND HE COMMANDED US TO PREACH TO THE PEOPLE, AND TO TESTIFY THAT IT IS HE WHO WAS ORDAINED BY GOD TO BE JUDGE OF THE LIVING AND THE DEAD. TO HIM ALL THE PROPHETS WITNESS THAT, THROUGH HIS NAME, WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL RECEIVE REMISSION OF SINS."**

There it is! The Good News of Jesus life, death and resurrection for all people. That is why Cornelius and his family could be assured of peace with God, even though they were not Jews, were not circumcised, and did not keep the Sabbath day or any other Jewish regulations.

Do you see why this text is such an important Epiphany text, so important for you and me, who are Gentiles, like Cornelius, not of God's people, but now are made one of God's people through faith in Jesus?

We have that peace announced by the angels at Jesus' birth. It is peace between the righteous God and us sinners, and Jesus is the one mediator to bring it about. Through His vicarious work, through His perfect life lived in our place, through His sacrificial death for us and by His resurrection from the dead, He has brought about this peace, this oneness with our Heavenly Father.

The warfare is over. The barrier of sin has been torn down and removed forever. The debt has been paid in full! The offenses have all been washed away. For Jesus' sake we have been declared "NOT GUILTY" and have been reconciled to God. That is why Jesus is called the "Prince of Peace!"

And finally Peter told Cornelius and tells us:

III: Jesus wants His life to be Imitated by all.

Peter said **"THAT WORD YOU KNOW, WHICH WAS PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT ALL JUDEA, AND BEGAN FROM GALILEE AFTER THE BAPTISM WHICH JOHN PREACHED: HOW GOD ANOINTED JESUS OF NAZARETH WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND WITH POWER, WHO WENT ABOUT DOING GOOD AND HEALING ALL WHO WERE OPPRESSED BY THE DEVIL, FOR GOD WAS WITH HIM. "**

Evidently Cornelius and his family also knew about John the Baptist and his message of repentance. They knew of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River. Peter is showing to them that Jesus willingly served as the Savior of all people. He desired to be baptized by John to fulfill all righteousness; to fulfill the Father's plan of salvation perfectly.

At His baptism Jesus was anointed **WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND WITH POWER.** This anointing was necessary because even though Jesus was true God, He was also true Man, born of a woman, and according to His human nature Jesus needed the Spirit's help through the power of the Word to complete our redemption so He could withstand the devil's temptations, so He could keep every commandment perfectly. He healed those who were oppressed by the devil by casting him out of them. By this anointing, the power of God was upon Him and with Him in His earthly ministry.

Jesus is Lord of all! That means He is also your Lord and my Lord. Just as the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus through the Word to live a perfectly obedient life in our place, a life as Peter said was of one **WHO WENT ABOUT DOING GOOD AND HEALING ALL WHO WERE OPPRESSED BY THE DEVIL;** so also the Holy Spirit can work in your heart and mine.

Through the Means of Grace---the Gospel in Word and in the Sacraments---the Spirit not only leads us to believe in Jesus, trust that God's grace in Christ also earned our salvation and brought about peace with our Heavenly Father, but the Spirit will also motivate you and me to live for Christ going about doing good according to God's will and proclaiming His Good News to others thereby bringing them spiritual healing and setting them free from the power of Satan.

Christ is our Epiphany Peace! May we show that in our lives and in our actions, and also pass that same message on to others so that they can enjoy that same peace we have in Jesus, our Epiphany Lord!

Amen.