

SHINE Devotional

Week 33 – Lesson 1



A Certain Man

Scripture reading Acts 10:1

“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,”

Physicians speak based upon data. We rely upon them to share unbiased truth and facts related to the situation they observe. We want truth, options, remedies, and solutions. We expect those in the medical field to share uncompromised information. No doubt, Dr. Luke, the human author of Acts felt compelled to relay undeniable facts when sharing the history of the apostles in his writings. Eleven times in the book he uses the adjective *“certain”* to describe an individual who interacts with the power of God. These records would seem little more than parables or fairy tales if there was no historical record to validate their occurrences. Luke uses the term to highlight a specific lame man in chapter 3, Ananias in chapter 5, and Simon, the sorcerer, in chapter 8. These miracles and stories were not tribal anecdotes. The work of God was substantiated fact. The unbelieving world views faith as dreams and silliness. The Word of God marries faith to fact. The empty tomb proves the veracity of Christ’s resurrection. The unchanging Word of God remains historically, scientifically, and spiritually valid. However, the greatest proof of faith is found in the lives whom God transforms. Reflect on the life you would have absent the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament says, *“I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am. Yea, before the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?”* (Isaiah 43:12-13). The life of the believer serves as the proof of God’s power to save. The Gospel is for the whole world, but its power is seen in the lives of individuals who experience the forgiveness of the Savior and share it with the world around them. All of us are certain men. We are all individuals who are called to know the Savior. I believe Dr. Luke is so fixated on verifying the events of the Gospel that he repeatedly uses the phrase *“A certain”*. The Gospel is not a wild leap of faith. It is a verifiable reality that is best seen in the lives of individuals who claim Jesus’s name. May God help us to reflect his great name today!

SHINE Devotional

Week 33 – Lesson 2



Religiously Lost

Scripture reading Acts 10:2

“A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.”

What are the marks of a Christian? The answer could include answers such as: sincerity, prayer, charitable giving, and respect for the Holy. These are good answers. Looking at the life of Cornelius the centurion Acts 10, one could conclude that he was ready to face his Maker. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Cornelius valued the things of God greatly. Religious living impacted him greatly. He was serious about God. His devotion produced a fervor to share his income with those in need. Amazing, but he was still lost. No amount of money or religious zeal can atone for sin. There is no alternative, sincere path to redemption. Thankfully, Cornelius refused to let the arrogance of his religious zeal blind him to his need of salvation.

Three lessons come to mind when reading about the devotion of this soldier.

1. Sincerity alone will not save anyone. If it did, Cornelius would be at the front of the line for admission to Heaven. He was lost and no amount of religion could fix his problem. He understood his need and prayed.
2. God is not hiding from people. In Proverbs 8:17, Matthew 7:7-8, and Hebrews 11:6, the Bible reveals the desire of God to interact with man. This centurion needed a Savior and God would not hide from him.
3. We see from Scripture this profound truth, good works are an action of faith and not an action to faith. The language is subtle, but the truth is profound. No one ever has or ever will be admitted into Heaven for their religious works. When religion confuses the work of man for the Divine we discover disappointment.

Cornelius had all the boxes checked. He was a leader with a good career path, esteemed in his community, and respected in his family, but he was religiously lost. He needed to meet Jesus. When did you replace your feeble attempts at Heaven for the saving grace that Jesus offers? If you know Jesus, let your works demonstrate the power of salvation in your life today. Pray, fear God, and give to someone as a way to show you are not religiously lost.

SHINE Devotional

Week 33 – Lesson 3



The End of an Angel's Ability

Scripture reading Acts 10:3-6

“He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.”

“Every time a bell rings, an Angel gets his wings.” Zuzu Bailey quoted her teacher in the classic holiday film “It’s a Wonderful Life.” We are inundated with dozens of perceptions of angels in our culture. Some are good and others are not. Roma Downey taught us what it was like to be “Touched by an Angel” in the 90’s. Before her, Michael Landon drove us down the “Highway to Heaven”. Even Mickey Mouse’s dog Pluto dealt with combatting good and bad angels in his short cartoons. The subject of angels intrigues our minds. They announced the birth of Christ, spoke at His tomb, and admonished the disciples at His ascension. These good tidings of great joy shared by the heavenly beings opened spiritual conversations but could not seal the deal.

In the passage above, the Bible records the interaction of the centurion with an angel! The religious soldier needed salvation and he interacted with a messenger from heaven. God could have chosen to allow the angels to share the salvation message, but He did not. He reserved that privilege for humans alone. Men and women are commissioned to share the Gospel. Let the burden of that responsibility weigh on you for a moment. God’s method for the promulgation of the Gospel is Christians. The angel pointed Cornelius to the truth but did not call him to repentance. Cornelius sought God, interacted with an angel, performed religious acts, and was still lost. Angels carry messages from God, but Christians carry the Gospel. We must be bold to speak truth, show love, but ultimately share the Gospel with someone today!

SHINE Devotional

Week 33 – Lesson 4



Joppa

Scripture reading Acts 10:5-6

“And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.”

Cities in the Bible remind us of significant acts of God’s power. The name Jericho conjures memories of God’s unpredictable power of God. Bethlehem is best remembered for the stable, manger, and birth of Jesus Christ. Joppa holds a storied history. It was a port city similar to Long Beach, California. Major avenues of commerce utilized its geography for trade and travel. King Solomon brought the lumber from Lebanon to use in building the temple through the port of Joppa. *“And we will cut wood out of Lebanon, as much as thou shalt need: and we will bring it to thee in floats by sea to Joppa; and thou shalt carry it up to Jerusalem”* (2 Chronicles 2:16) Jonah the prophet rebelled against the command of God and fled to Joppa. *“But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD”* (Jonah 1:3). At one point in history, Joppa was used to magnify the great God of the universe. At another, the same city became the home of a rebellious heart. In our Scripture today, God’s angel commanded Cornelius to send men to the city of Joppa. Why? Because the Apostle Peter took lodging there with a craftsman named Simon. Their interaction in this place would upend the work of God in historical fashion. From this city, Peter received guidance to share the Gospel with people who had been foreign to God’s work for generations.

Many times, people feel they need a new environment to accomplish the goals, vision, and life God is directing them to lead. Joppa illustrates that good and bad are not incumbent to a place. The same God who led Cornelius to Joppa led Jonah away from Joppa. A truth is thereby revealed. The place does not determine one’s success or spirituality, but rather an individual adherence to God’s leading. God calls some people to grow in Him in Joppa, others rebel in Joppa. God calls some to shine in Las Vegas. Others follow a different plan. It is not the place; it is the person who follows God’s tailored plan for their lives.

SHINE Devotional

Week 33 – Lesson 5



BACON

Scripture reading Acts 10:9-14

“On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending upon him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.”

It is lunchtime. Have you ever been on one of those diets where you restrict some carbs, sugar, dairy, or other food for a period of time? Your body craves it. That first cheeseburger, fries, and milkshake tastes like manna until it settles, and your clean body reacts adversely. It wonders why you are putting this vile refuse into the pristine temple of celery and sparkling water. That feeling compares to the emotional, cultural, and physical toll on Peter with God’s newest step of faith. Since a child, he learned and respected the dietary laws of the Mosaic commands. Now clear as day, God is commanding him to violate that order. Eat bacon! Few reading this would balk at such a step of faith, but Peter did... three times! After twenty centuries of understanding this liberty, we accept it readily. Mature Christianity understands the liberty of grace, but if Peter struggled with grace so will we.

Notice the contrast of the main characters of the passage. The centurion was bound by a sense of moral obligations attempting to please God and was lost. The Christian was exercising more liberty than ever and had a wonderful life of faith. When we temper liberty by grace and seek to promote Christ, He directs our steps accordingly and the Kingdom of God grows. The Bible says, *“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by **love serve one another**”* (Galatians 5:13). Liberty in Christ realizes old traditions and keeping the law fails to please God. Only in Christ are our works of value. Be free! Use your freedom to serve someone who needs to know the Savior. Where can you exercise your liberty to advance the Kingdom today?

SHINE Devotional

Week 33 – Lesson 6



Obedience Without Understanding

Scripture reading Acts 10:15-17

“And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,”

The Christian life demands sacrifice, as God calls us to do hard things. Our founder and leader died to make salvation possible. Often in Scripture we are called to sacrifice, give, and share. Giving and sharing are hard, but sacrifice is the next level of difficult. There are times when obedience requires doing a hard thing. In today's passage, God was enlisting His most vocal disciple to sacrifice his heritage, identity, and culture for the sake of the Gospel. Hebrew followers of Christ valued greatly their heritage, yet, Christ values salvation. Every Christian must wrestle with the challenge of obedience to Christ or allegiance to a human system. God is upending a tradition and experience. He is again shaking up the comfort of Peter. It is taking him to a new level of allegiance to the Savior. Peter struggled with obedience. The man who recklessly stepped out onto the waves hesitated at eating a non-kosher piece of meat. It seems like a little thing, but it held huge implications. Believers fall into the trap of thinking they would follow God in big things like martyrdom, but often it is the small things like what we eat, what we drink, and our daily tasks that bring glory to God. (See 1 Corinthians 10:31.) Peter did not even know why God was using him in this fashion, and neither will we at times. Our intent is not to understand but obey. Soon after this, Peter would be called upon to introduce the Gentile world to the Gospel. The concept was entirely foreign to his contemporary understanding. It changed the world. We live in the glow of this obedience. God may be calling you to obey in a hard thing. Peter doubted the directive but obeyed. We must be willing to do the same. God uses everyday obedience to change the world.