

Sunday Reading: Joel 2:28-29

After this I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity; then your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will have dreams, and your young men will see visions. ²⁹ I will even pour out my Spirit on the male and female slaves in those days.

Intro: For decades, a well-documented miracle has been occurring in the Muslim world and to some degree in Jewish circles—men and women receiving dreams of Jesus calling them to follow him. These reports most often happen in countries or areas where there is little or no presence of the Christian faith. No one preaching the gospel who affirms the gospel to them. A common thread woven through these stories is that people are seeking to know God, to follow him and seeking a deeper revelation of him. **I've personally listened to maybe 20-30 stories**, I have saved about 100 of these in my youtube cue—and I have to say I am blown away by the fruit—*saved lives. People who were following devoutly following Allah and now are born again believers in Jesus.*

Some have tried to diminish and even call these testimonies into question. I think well-meaning Fundamentalist preachers who are trying to safeguard Scripture. But in my view this is just misguided. Let me list a couple of the prominent objections:

What about Hebrews 1? Doesn't it say that God has already revealed everything about Jesus in the Bible, not dreams and visions? No. Hebrews 1 says no such thing. **Hebrews 1 says that in the past God spoke to our fathers and the prophets in various ways and by various means. But now, he has spoken through his Son.** If Jesus wants to reveal himself (who is the final revelation of God to man) to an individual in a dream or a vision then who are you oh man to say the Sovereign God is not allowed to do that? Moreover, the Scripture explicitly says that in the last days God will pour out his Spirit on all flesh and young men will see visions and old men will dream dreams. Last I checked we are still in the last days.

Caveat: Any so-called revelation or dream of Jesus must be in alignment with the Jesus of Scripture—who *is the Jesus of history.*

Doesn't Paul say that Faith comes by hearing and hearing comes when the Word (Gospel) is preached? Yes! But let's take Islam as an example. The Koran teaches mentions Jesus over 90 times between 15 Surahs (chapters). **It teaches that Jesus was the greatest prophet before Mohammed, that he was born of a virgin Mary, that he will return to earth to judge the Antichrist. When they utter Jesus' name they always recite "peace be upon him" in Arabic. They believe that Jesus performed miracles. They are taught that he is not the Son of God (4:171; 5:17), did not die on the cross for our sins (Surrah 4:157), and did not raise to life on the third day bodily, and was not exalted to the throne of heaven.**

In denying the Gospel, the Imams unwittingly teach Muslims the gospel. They know enough of it to be the foundation of a dream or vision of Jesus calling them to himself.

They know enough about Jesus to know who he is and who Christians believe he is—which is plenty of a foundation for a dream or visitation from Christ.

Transition: What we're witnessing is the continuing phenomenon of God revealing himself to Gentiles who are seeking him, though they do not know the God whom they are seeking yet.

A Roman Centurion has a vision which paralleled the message the God delivered to Peter. This is the second paired vision (the first being Saul's experience of the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus and Ananias' vision confirming God's work in Saul).

What is remarkable about this story is that God has now turned his attention to the most powerful, dominant totalitarian regime in the world. Rome does not have a competitor for supremacy and God is now turning to the Greek and Roman gentile world to bring them in to the family of God. A fact that is so astonishing, that if Peter himself had not been there to witness and minister the gospel to them—the Jerusalem church may not have been able to believe it. God is now saving the pagan, immoral, lost Gentiles.

Cornelius: A devout man without the Gospel— He has God's attention, but that doesn't mean that he has salvation.

10:1 There was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment.

Background

- **Caesarea:** Luke mentions Caesarea about 15 times in the book of Acts (8:40; 9:30; 10:1, 24; 11:11; 12:19; 18:22; 21:8, 16; 23:23, 33; 25:1, 4, 6, 13).
 - Caesarea by the sea was a beautiful Palestinian city named in honor of the Caesar.
 - Philip had already gone before Peter and preached there—paving the way for a Gentile revival.
 - Though it is technically a Jewish town, it has been overrun by wealthy Gentiles who have set up statues to their patron gods. Jews would not have been normally welcomed there. Instead, a Jew would feel much more comfortable in Joffa 35 miles south of Caesarea.
 - Jews and Syrians (what we could call today Palestinians) often fought. The Jews claimed the city as their own, the Syrian retaliated by killing tens of thousands of Jewish residents. When conflict occurred between these two semitic people's, Rome always sided with the Syrians. Because they reviled the Jews—particularly their monotheism which is their insistence that there is only one God.
- **Cornelius: A Centurion of** The Italian cohort (this particular cohort was regiment of archers) was stationed in Caesarea.
 - Centurions had authority over between 80-100 men.
 - When the centurion orders his unit to do anything, they obey him as if the command had come from the emperor himself. When Jesus met a Roman centurion stationed in Capernaum (Lk 7:8), the Centurion exemplified great faith in him by saying, "I tell this one to go, and he goes. I tell another to come here, and does it." The implication being that while he has authority over earthly men (and limited authority over his own regiment), Jesus has authority over sickness and disease.
 - **Based on what we know of history of the region, Cornelius is possibly a retired soldier who is native to the area.** Soldiers who were actively stationed in a "hot zone" typically did not bring their families with them. Luke suggests that Cornelius lives there with his entire extended "household." Roman families could have been sizable, the average home having between 20-30 people (including children and grandchildren).

What do we know that distinguishes Cornelius from other Romans or Gentiles in the area?

Cornelius' Devotion: He responded to the light of revelation he had.

² He was a **devout man and feared God** along with his **whole household**. He did many **charitable deeds** for the Jewish people and always **prayed to God**.

- **His Devotion.** This word means “consecrated” or “loyal.” Devotion included personal and public piety—consecration toward a deity or a philosophy. How did he show his devotion to the God of Israel?
 - **Devotion in the ancient world was public not merely a private matter.** Everyone would have known that he was a believer in the God of Israel and had rejected the false gods and idols of Roman culture.
 - Pastor **Mark Dever** has said, “**Your Christian faith is always personal but never private.**” God has called us to both announce our faith through baptism and to live out our faith in community—not as secret Christians but as **publicly affirming and embracing the cross of Jesus** as the defining orientation of our lives—both its **comforts** and its **costs**; its riches and its horrors.
- **His Fear of God.**
 - As we learned last week, fear of God is an awesome wonder. Godly fear is a sense of holy panic that we serve before an all-powerful God.
 - **Fear of God is to experience God's glory with trembling pleasure, and the awesome wonder of his power. The same mountain that thrills you can kill you—but even so, come summit the mountain. The same fire that warms you can burn a forest down—even so, come near the flame.** We serve an awesome God, worthy of our worship, who allows us to experience the rapture of his glorious being—but we are reminded that he is not our little buddy. **He is God Almighty—the infinite, personal, loving-and-just creator of the universe.**
- **His Household.** I want to show you how important it is in Scripture for a person and their household getting saved. The church met in a variety of venues: lecture halls; theaters; the Jerusalem temple; basilicas. **Luke and Paul often emphasized households as the foundation of the church in a given area (Luke 10:5; 19:9; Acts 16:15; cf. 2:46; 5:42; Acts 16:15, 31–34; 18:8; Rom 16:10, 11; 1 Cor 1:16; 16:15–16; 2 Tim 4:19).** And it wasn't just Cornelius who feared the Lord and served him with devotion. It was his entire household. It was expected in this world that children, grandchildren, slaves and spouses would follow the *paterfamilias'* religious faith. The father of the family had absolute authority to determine the direction, beliefs, vocation and devotion of the family and the children's spouses.

Illus. Before my dad died he had experienced a noticeable change. After going to church with my mom, he fell under conviction of the gospel and I saw an immediate difference in his life. I have often reflected on that and wondered how different our family would have been had my Dad come to faith earlier.

It is no exaggeration to say that the greatest crisis that faces America today is the absence of men and fathers who love Jesus. We need to pray for men to lead their homes and for revival in the family.

- **His generosity in prayer and finances. “He did many charitable deeds”**

- **He was generous toward the Jewish people**—God’s holy family on earth. There’s something about a generous spirit that is so attractive, so enviable.

Illus. As a teenager I was asked by the missions board at my church to accompany some teams on missions projects.

I thought it was an awesome opportunity to share the gospel. They thought it was a great opportunity to invest in me for future ministry. One of the wealthiest members of the church paid my way...I found that out later. **Years afterward, I reflected on how much one person’s act of generosity changed the trajectory of my life.** It was on those short-term mission trips that I saw first-hand that people in the world don’t live the way we do in America. It was on those short-term trips that I met Christians living in shanty houses—some of the worst poverty I’d ever witnessed. **And yet—these believers who met in a cinderblock building with thatch roofs, with no air conditioning, dirt floors, scorpions in the rafters—in constant danger of flooding—so encouraged my faith.** They frankly put me to shame. And it changed something inside of me, for the better, for the kingdom. I was not only encouraged and brought under conviction because of their joy despite their lack of resources and physical setting—I **was equally encouraged to be part of a local church that had decided to invest so much of their resources in the gospel, in missions, in the furthering of the Kingdom of Jesus in the third world.**

Never underestimate the power of one generous act.

- **He often prayed to God.** This signifies that he was a convert to Judaism’s theology but likely not to their ethnic identity markers. **Another reason he is likely retired is because as an active duty serviceman, he would have practiced the imperial cult—the worship of Caesar.**¹ It is very unlikely that Luke or any devout Jew who accepted Gentile converts at the time, would have thought of a Roman Gentile as “devout” and a “God-fearer” if they also practiced the worship of other, foreign Gods—particularly the Roman Emperor as a god incarnate.

¹ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary & 2: Introduction and 1:1–14:28*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012–2013), 1754.

God had originally revealed himself to a non-Jew, Abraham. God's plan all along was that through one man (Abraham) he would bring forth one nation (Israel) who would bring forth one new man (Christ)—and through the Second Adam bring forth a new humanity consisting of both Jew and Gentile.

This encounter is as important as God appearing to Moses in the burning bush. The entire human race is going to change from this moment onward—the nations will rejoice and be glad and see the salvation of the Lord.

We have lived for two thousand years in Jesus and Paul both referred to as “the times of the gentiles.” Jesus refers to this in Luke 21:24 saying that “Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

Paul seems to explain this [Romans 11](#), saying, “A partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”

Folks, *we have been living in a window of time where God's focus, his attention and efforts by the Spirit have been turned to the Gentile (non-Jewish) world* in order to win as many as possible to the Gospel. And that shift of focus began right here in the story of God's saving the household of Cornelius in the 2nd largest and most prominent city in all of ancient Roman Palestine.

Recap: Prayer

- 1. We of all people should be living out our [personal faith](#) in a [public way](#). God will help us to do that. Give us open doors that we might share the grace of Christ to those around us who so desperately need it.**
- 2. We of all people should live with a [panicked wonder](#)—thrilled at your glory; a holy righteous fear of God.** May we walk humbly before you Lord.
- 3. We of all people should have men who lead their households to faith and lead them in the faith.** God give men the courage to step up and lead our families.
- 4. We should be known as the most generous people on earth.** As opportunities come our way to express the generosity of the Gospel—Lord may we seize those moments and further your plan of salvation in the world.