

A MOMENTOUS INTERVIEW

Acts 10:17-33

When Peter awoke from his trance, he was in a state of doubt as to the real meaning of the vision which he had just seen. It is interesting to note that God appeared to Cornelius and Peter in a vision. In the case of Cornelius, it was given to assure him that his prayers were heard and to direct him as to what he should do. In the case of Peter, it was given as a softening-up process to get him in a state of readiness to receive the servants of Cornelius by the time they arrived on the scene. Again the Lord was working at both ends of the line.

At the very time that Peter was confused as to the meaning of the message from heaven, the three servants were knocking at Simon's gate, inquiring for Simon Peter. And still Peter was in doubt. Just then the Holy Spirit said unto him, "Behold, three men seek thee. Arise, therefore, and get thee down and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them." At last the light broke, and Peter saw clearly what he should do. He was told how many men were at the door seeking him. He was told to go with those men "doubting nothing." But why should he go "doubting nothing"? "For I have sent them." The same Holy Spirit who was now sending Simon Peter was the One responsible for having sent the three men to him. What a merciful and understanding Guide is He!

Peter introduced himself to the men saying, "Behold, I am he who ye seek." Of that much Peter was certain. Then he asked the men the reason for their journey. "What is the cause wherefore ye are come?" Peter here resembled the prophet Jonah in stalling for time. And after they had given him a detailed account of the mission, Peter invited them to lodge with him until the morrow, when together they would return to the house of Cornelius.

Peter is here passively submissive, to say the least. In spite of everything he had heard and seen, he was still reluctant to have any dealings with the pagan Gentiles. But God's Spirit had commanded him to reply, "doubting nothing," and, with those words ringing in his ears, he consented to go.

In anticipation of their arrival, Cornelius had gathered together his relatives and friends in his house to hear Peter. As Peter was approaching, Cornelius was so grateful to him for coming that, in his enthusiasm, he fell down at his feet in the spirit of adoration. Peter was moved deeply with this extraordinary reception, but he confessed that after all he was only a man, and, therefore, not to be adored or worshiped. Cornelius then escorted him into the room where many were awaiting their arrival. What were Peter's first words to that group? He frankly told them of his former prejudices toward the Gentiles, and then added that "God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean."

Peter next asked that they tell him the reason they had sent for him. "For what intent have you sent for me?" Cornelius then recited the whole story and finally concluded with these words, recorded in verse 33. "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."

This text portrays for us a model service. There is something unusual in it, namely, that before the preacher began his sermon the audience could say to him: "We are all here present." That was a good thing to say. It must have been an inspiration to Peter, as it certainly would be if spoken today by a congregation to a preacher.

I. A Model Congregation.

1. It was a punctual congregation.

When Peter arrived all were present. To each of them the first of the service was of highest importance. One of the embarrassing features to rightly taught

and cultured people is the lack of punctuality on the part of many who attend church services in these days. Some people are always late. Whether they are late to the services on account of laziness, slowness or in order that they might be seen, they not only miss a part of the services, but they disturb those leading in the worship and others who are present on time. In many cases it is a mere habit, but to say the least it is a bad one and is a reflection on those who are guilty. Moreover, it is a habit which can be overcome with a very little effort.

2. It was a reverent congregation.
Its members did not meet in a frivolous spirit. They were not afraid of God but they held Him in awe. There was no whispering and talking in that congregation. Well might we pray that those coming into our midst might be charmed and won by a beautiful reverence on our part.
3. It was an attentive congregation.
They regarded the Apostle as God's spokesman and they were ready to hear what he had to say. They had assembled for the specific purpose of hearing God's message through His servant. Many motives influence attendance upon religious services nowadays. Some are present to see, some to be seen, some to criticize, some to while away the time, some to be with others, some from habit, some from curiosity, and some to worship God and to learn His will.
4. It was a praying congregation.
Prayer was a regular function with them. They did not look upon prayer as a duty to be performed in a perfunctory manner. They considered prayer a matter of tremendous importance. Their prayers were not generalizations or vain repetitions. Instead, they were definite and pointed. They wanted a preacher to come and guide them in the truth, so they prayed for what they wanted and got it.
5. It was a truth-seeking congregation.
They were willing to put forth an effort to get the truth. God directed them to send for Peter. Immediately they dispatched messengers to bring him. When Peter arrived he inquired, "For what intent have ye sent for me?" They did not send for him because he possessed a grand personality, had a ready flow of words, had ability to attract crowds, or was a good mixer. They invited him to come to them because they wanted to know the whole counsel of God. Their minds were untrammelled by prejudices and unbiased by dogmas. They were prepared to accept whatever God might command them through His servant.
6. It was a witnessing congregation.
While they were waiting for the arrival of Peter, Cornelius called together his relatives and witnessed to them. Empty churches are tragedies, and are due to a lack of witnessing to neighbors and friends. Here is where one's Christian duty begins. One who will not witness to his neighbors will not witness abroad.
7. It was a liberal congregation.
They knew nothing about Christian giving, but they gave "much alms." They were not blind to the poverty and distress about them, nor did they turn deaf ears to the calls for help. Their giving was not just enough to say that they had responded, but they gave "much." There are some liberal givers in every good congregation.

II. A Model Preacher.

1. A praying preacher.
There is no power apart from prayer to God.

2. A preacher with a world vision.

He became such a preacher through prayer. Before he prayed he was a Jew with a message for the Jews. Through prayer and fasting God was preparing him by a vision for a call to a foreign field. God broke down his prejudice and self-interest and he willingly said, "Speak for Thy servant heareth."

God's will became his will. He was ready to go wherever God might lead him. He cared nothing about criticism so long as He had God's approval.

3. A preacher of the Word of God.

He began to tell them of the "Word which God sent." He did not have any time to entertain seekers after the truth with travelogues or tales of Jewish customs. Their souls were hungry for God's truth and he fed them. It is the task of the preacher to throw the lifeline to the shipwrecked and to feed and warm those who have been saved from shipwreck.

A true minister of the Gospel of Christ has a threefold ministry to perform.

(1) The ministry of thinking.

The force of this contention will probably be granted by all, but if a man is to think he must have time in which to do it. He has to sift the dust-heap of opinion. He has to spend his intellectual strength in gathering manna for his people, and the church that denies its minister the necessary time for this work is, in the long run, itself the loser. The minister who wanders restlessly from house to house is at one and the same time robbing the church and himself. Nothing in the world worth possessing is easily obtained. The man who seeks knowledge must be willing to give mental sweat; the man who seeks wealth must be prepared to "live laborious days"; and the man who seeks power must be ready to sacrifice ease.

(2) The ministry of speaking.

It is by free speech that free thought is kept alive. If you muzzle the one, you kill the other. It is essential that we should enjoy the fullest liberty in which to tell out the whole message of God.

(3) The ministry of acting.

Creed and deed must go together. This is the only orthodoxy that is of any value. One great question we should ask ourselves is, Does my religion make me any better? This is the real test to apply. Character is the greatest evangelistic agency. It is what we are that tells.

III. A Model Message.

1. It is a message for all.

"I perceive that God is no respecter of persons." This message is suited to the needs of all. All need it, and what a responsibility we have to proclaim it.

2. It is a message of salvation.

It centers in Christ. "Whosoever believeth in Him shall receive the remission of sins." It is the only message men need, and the only message that can bring salvation to any. We need to sound forth this message. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." What if people do not hear of that name?

3. It is a message that calls for obedience.

He so proclaimed this message that the saved were led into the path of obedience and happy service.

IV. Model Results.

1. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in mighty power.
This brings conviction to Christians who are remiss in their duties and neglectful of their spiritual opportunities. Following this they went to witnessing and proved that they were right before God. Then the Holy Spirit began to work among the lost.
2. The public profession of faith in Christ as Saviour.
3. The baptism of the saved as a witness to others.

When these things take place the saints are refreshed, sinners are saved, the church is blessed, and the Lord is glorified. We may have these results if we desire them enough to pay the price for them.