

THE LORD WILL GUIDE US

Acts 10:1-16

Cornelius was the first Gentile convert to the Christian faith. Because he was a Gentile, the Jews did not think he could be saved. They shut all Gentiles out from the grace of God. He was a Roman soldier, stationed in the Jewish town of Caesarea, a city on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea between Joppa and Tyre, about seventy miles northwest of Jerusalem, where his very presence was regarded with disdain. These soldiers were not regarded as religious men, but were thought of as cold-blooded, unsympathetic and hard of heart. Cornelius was a centurion, which means a military officer in command of a hundred soldiers.

Cornelius was a devout, God-fearing, duty-performing, alms-giving, and prayer-offering man. He was a sincere, honest, conscientious and faithful worshiper of God.

To Cornelius God vouchsafed a vision in which he saw an angel approaching him. The appearance of this celestial messenger struck fear into the heart of Cornelius. "And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and he said, 'What is it Lord?'" The angel replied, "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God." What could have been more encouraging to Cornelius than the assurance that God approved of his prayers and his alms? Likewise, our deeds declare our honor or dishonor, our sincerity or insincerity, our godliness or wickedness. Cornelius had a bank account with God. What was there to his credit? He was devout; he was sincere; he was a good example to his family and to his soldiers; he was a man of prayer; and he performed many deeds which were helpful to his fellowmen.

Imagine the thrill that came to the soul of Cornelius when the heavenly messenger bade him to contact Peter, who was at that very time in Joppa, a city not very far away. This incident certainly teaches us that God knows all about us. He knew Peter by name, and the city where he was, and the name and location of the house where he was staying, and the business of the man where he lodged. He also knew the prejudices of Peter that had to be overcome before he could be useful with Cornelius. He knew the needs of Cornelius, and just the man who could help him. He Who sees the sparrow fall, and numbers the hairs on our heads, will not overlook our needs, nor fail to hear our prayers. God also knows our weaknesses and our limitations.

After the departure of the angel that spoke to Cornelius, he immediately called two of his servants and a devout soldier, and, after explaining matters to them, sent them away. The three men went for the purpose of bringing Peter back with them. However, these men were on a fruitless mission unless God took Peter in hand first. He was filled with such deep-rooted prejudices that nothing short of divine intervention could overcome them. But He Who had moved the heart of Cornelius to pray, and had given him a heavenly vision, would also move the heart of Peter to assist him in the hour of his need.

About twelve o'clock the next day, "Peter went up on the housetop to pray." Both his soul and his body were in a craving state; his soul craving for communications from God, and his body for sustaining food. Peter had no more than reached the housetop when he fell into a trance, a state in which the senses are sealed to all surrounding objects. It was while he was in this state that he had a vision in which he beheld a sheet let down from heaven. To his utter disgust and horror, within the folds of the sheet were all kinds of wild and revolting animals, creeping things, and fowls of the air. Everything within him recoiled from such a ghastly sight.

This vision was symbolic. It teaches the divine origin of the human race. All are let down from heaven. It teaches the great diversities in the race. There are physical, mental, and moral distinctions. The purpose of the vision was to convince Peter that the Gentiles, whom the Jews had esteemed unclean and profane, were as admissible to the

privileges of Christianity as the Hebrew people. When the Lord said, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat," Peter protested saying, "Not so, Lord." Peter was so opposed to the plan of God that he even went so far as to refuse to do what his Lord had commanded. In the language which he spoke, Peter replied in two words, "Medamos, kurie," meaning "Not so, (in no wise), Lord." It would be impossible to have a greater contradiction in two words. It is a very strange combination of words. It is an odd jumble of self-will and reverence.

We are often at fault in the matter of correct speech. In our utterance there is often faith mixed with unbelief, love defaced with a want of submission, gratitude combined with distrust, humility flavored with self-conceit, courage undermined with cowardice, and fervor mingled with indifference. However, whoever says, "Not so," should never say, "Lord." Multitudes give Christ His title, but deny Him His rights. They are verbally right but practically wrong.

Bear in mind that the man who said, "Not so, Lord," was not only a Christian, but one who had enjoyed a Pentecostal experience. He had been greatly blessed by the Lord; and yet, when this great opportunity to take the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles presented itself, he said, "Not so, Lord." If he had simply said, "Not so," that would have been understandable; or if he had said, "Even so, Lord," that would have been permissible; but his remark, "Not so, Lord," cannot be justified.

Christ is the Saviour of every Christian, but He is not the Lord of every Christian. Christ can be the Saviour of the soul without being the Lord of the life. But, He cannot be the Lord of the life without being the Saviour of the soul. His Saviourship is made real by our faith, but His Lordship is made real by our obedience. Relationship is one thing and fellowship is another, and we know perfectly well that there can be the former without the latter. A young man may not be on speaking terms with his father, but that want of fellowship does not destroy the relationship. There may be union without communion. Where a man and woman become husband and wife there is union, but there is not always communion. There cannot be health where there is not life, but there can be life without health. So, every Christian knows Christ as a Saviour, but everyone does not know Him as Lord.

Are you saying, "Not so, Lord"? If so, He is saying to you, "And why call ye me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not the things which I say?" Until this matter is put right, nothing can be right. It is not for the subject to dictate to the King. It is not for the servant to disobey the Master. Many say they believe the Bible "from cover to cover", but in reality they do not. You do not believe any truth until you have committed yourself to it. You do not believe any command until you have obeyed it. You do not believe any promise until you have trusted it. You do not really believe anything until you incarnate it in terms of character and conduct.

Is Christ your Lord? The tests for knowing the answer to this question are very simple. Are you living a life of obedience to Him? Does He direct your life? Do you relate everything to Him? Do you seek to follow His guidance in all things? Do you consult Him about your reading, about your friendships, about your career, about how you earn and spend your money? Do you? If you read, and choose, and earn, and spend just as those who are not professed Christians, what difference is there between you and them beyond the fact that you have made a profession? There are such things as Christian standards and such things as worldly standards; such things as Christian motives and such things as worldly motives. If a Christian just accepts the standards and follows the practices of the world without referring to the rightness or wrongness of them, he is simply saying, "Not so, Lord." One does not have a right to call Him "Lord", and then deny that He is by his daily walk and habits of life. If He is our Lord, we should obey when He commands and follow when He points the way.

Christ said, "Ye are friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." In the light of this fact, every professed Christian is not a friend of Christ. Are you one of Christ's

friends? He wants you to be. The condition of friendship is obedience. The Saviour longs to be your Lord. He asks not only to be trusted, but also to be obeyed. His main charge against His people today is that they are disobedient. Many are disobedient to Him because they are afraid of what others may think or say. Behind disobedience is fear, and behind fear is distrust. Many trust Christ with their souls for eternity who will not trust Him with their lives for time. That is why you may be regenerated and yet disapproved. Christ said, "Even so, Father", but many of His professed followers are saying to Him, "Not so, Lord". Many are saying, "Yes, Saviour," but "No, Lord." Remember that profession must be followed by practice.

Peter recognized this fact. He didn't repeat this mistake. After this incident, he came to have a Lord as well as a Saviour. He cut out the "Not so" and underlined "Lord." This is very evident in his two epistles. Are you following his example, in this regard? If so, you will emerge a different person. The call of Christ to you and to me is a call to prompt, cheerful, and complete obedience. Such obedience will bring the other needed blessings in its train.