



Life Got Messy: Week 3

Discussion Guide

Into the Word:

This week's sermon focused on the story of Abraham and Sarah and how the lack of patience led to a mess and a crisis of faith. Let's contrast that story with a story of patience that paid off.

Read Acts 10

- a) Cornelius was what the Jewish people of the day called "God fearing". He knew of God and respected God. He tried to live a pious life yet he was not a Jew and did not have a relationship with God. One day God spoke directly to Cornelius and instructed him to send for Peter. What do you think was missing from Cornelius' life that God wanted him to have?
- b) Notice that God did not tell Cornelius why he needed to see Peter or what Peter needed to tell him. Verse 37 tells us that Cornelius knew the story of Jesus and His disciples, including Peter. He had no idea why God was telling him to send for Peter. It could have been to receive a blessing or to receive a condemnation. All he knew is that the God he respected and tried to serve had given him an instruction to follow and he did.
- c) The distance from Caesarea (where Cornelius lived) to Joppa (where Peter was) is about 30 miles. The round trip would be about a 3 or 4 day journey. Cornelius sent his men to invite Peter and bring him to Caesarea. He did not know why only that God told him to do it. He also knew that it was going to be at least 3 days before he would find out why. It was also possible that he would not like the reason once Peter did show up. It was also possible that Peter would refuse to come because he was a devout Jew and Cornelius was a Gentile. How would you describe the faith of Cornelius?
- d) The Bible goes into great detail on how God prepared Peter for the visit from Cornelius' men and how Peter was prepared to accept them and their invitation to Joppa. But look at what Cornelius was doing in anticipation of Peter's visit. Verse 24 tells us that when Peter arrived at Cornelius' house, he didn't find just Cornelius but he found his relatives and close friends. How do you think they got there? What "leap of faith" did Cornelius have to take in order to invite his family and friends to an event that he had no idea about how it was going to end?
- e) When Peter arrived, Cornelius was still unsure of why he was sent for. He bowed and worshiped Peter which Peter was quick to correct. Cornelius tells him the story of what God instructed him to do and Peter realizes that he is there to witness to and share the Gospel of Christ with this Gentile and his family. As he does so, the Holy Spirit falls on Cornelius, his family, and friends. Cornelius waited patiently for Peter. He waited with his family and friends with no idea why or what was going to happen. All he knew was that God told him to hear what Peter had to say. How was Cornelius rewarded for his patience?

Apply the Word

- a) Contrast Cornelius with Abraham and Sarah. God gave both of them a message. Yes, the time tables are a little different but look at the actions of both. Sarah laughed at the promise of God and Abraham doubted and took things in his own hands. Both of these actions resulted in messes. Cornelius simply believed, did what God told him to do, and waited.
- b) Look at these possible responses that Cornelius could have had to the angel's message and think about what the result of each would have been.
- He could have ignored the request.
 - He could have argued that Peter, a devout Jew, would never come to a Gentile's house so he would just armor up in his finest gear and go himself to Peter and find out what God wanted.
 - As a Roman Centurion, he could have sent an armed guard to arrest Peter and bring him to Caesarea.
 - He could have sent the men and then just carried on as normal until Peter arrived only to greet him by himself.

What does it tell you about Cornelius and his faith in the goodness of God that he sent for Peter to invite him to Caesarea and that while he had no guarantee of a reply, he invited his family and friends to wait with him until he finally met Peter.

- c) Has it dawned on you how Cornelius' actions rewarded us? We are what the Jews would have called "God fearers". Good people but not true believers. It is because of Cornelius and his faith and actions that God instructed and showed Peter that God does not play favorites. All people are deserving of God's mercy and the salvation brought by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Including us.

Prayer Time-

Father, thank you that you do not show favoritism. Thank you that all it takes is the faith to trust that You are good and that You want the best for us. Please grant us the patience to wait for You in our mess and to know that it is going to be OK.