

A Soldier Finds Justice

✠ **No favoritism in fear** (vv.34-35)

✠ **God's powerful peace** (vv.36-38)

In the name of Jesus, the Savior of all, dear fellow soldiers of the cross:

The Bible tells us a few things about Cornelius, the Roman Centurion who first heard today's sermon text. This was a key event in the Epiphany of our Lord Jesus Christ that revealed the awesome effect of His Baptism and ours. It was also a major sea change in the life of the Apostle Peter and the early Christian Church. Let's visit Cornelius who's waiting to tell us how **A Soldier Finds Justice**.

✠ **No favoritism in fear** (vv.34-35)

*Welcome to my home. It's good of you to come, brothers and sisters. Retiring here in Caesarea along the Mediterranean coast is a soldier's dream come true. But every time I think back to that day when I was a young soldier, chills run up my spine. I have to tell you what God did to show me true **Justice** and how He convinced the Jewish believers to accept us Gentiles with **No favoritism in fear**.*

Most of that day was fairly normal. I always got up early to check my troops. Our Italian Regiment was part of the Roman legion under Governor Pontius Pilate. He had recently been through a near riot crucifying Jesus in Jerusalem. Back in the capital at Caesarea along the coast, I was a centurion with 100 Roman soldiers in my command. My family and I were converts to the Jewish faith. Our household servants also enjoyed helping the poor and worshiping the God of the Jews. They had taught us all to pray. When my duties were done for the day, that's how I spent my afternoons.

*One day about three o'clock I thought my eyes would bulge out of my head. I blinked hard to make sure I wasn't dreaming. But there he was as plain as day, an angel of God who actually knew my name. "**Cornelius!**" he said. Can you imagine a tough soldier like me with my heart nearly pounding out of my chest? I stared at him in fear. He knew all about me! "**Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.**" (Acts 10:4-6 NIV) A soldier loves a plan. I sent two servants and one of my God-fearing troops to get Peter.*

*What we didn't realize at the time was how God was working in Joppa too. Right when my guys were approaching the city, Peter was up on the roof at Simon the tanner's house praying. Later he told us about his triple vision of animals, birds and reptiles in a large sheet. Jews have strict dietary laws which he was being told to violate. Jesus Himself kept saying, "**Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.**" When Peter objected, the Lord answered, "**Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.**" (10:13-15)*

*Timing is everything. Just then my three men arrived. The Holy Spirit actually told Peter to go downstairs and meet them, and then to come along. Their words were very kind: "**We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people.**" Thank God, it's true. "**A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.**" (10:22) Imagine how I felt when Peter arrived a couple days later.*

*I instinctively bowed down, but Peter pulled me up. "**I'm only a man myself,**" he said. Many friends had come over. At first I was afraid when Peter said to us, "**You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him.**" Then Peter added, "**But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?**" (10:28f) I told him about my vision of the angel.*

*You have to understand, in those days most Jews hated us Gentiles. For me, a non-Jew, Gentile like you, to have a visit from Peter was enough to make a soldier cry tears of joy. My wife and half the servants were wiping their eyes, even our older children. Peter warmed our hearts when he said, “**I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.**” For all that I had been and everything I’d done as a soldier, God was not blaming me. Some things I couldn’t even tell my wife. We Romans slaughtered people and conquered kingdoms all around the Mediterranean world. Before the Jews told me about their LORD God, I used to have nightmares. And now I was receiving visions of angels and the kindest words from God. He did not look at the color of my skin or reject my Roman face. My ethnicity was not a problem for the God of the Jews. He saw what He put in my heart, my deep respect that showed in my actions. God saw how my family and I wanted to honor Him by helping the poor. We feared God with deep respect. Peter said God accepts us for Jesus’ sake right there in our Gentile home. God shows **No favoritism in fear.***

✠ God’s powerful peace (vv.36-38)

*Peter’s sermon was just warming up. He told us why we could rest at night and trust our eternity to **God’s powerful peace.** “**You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.**” My family and our household servants had heard about that Rabbi from Nazareth whom Pontius Pilate crucified because the Jews insisted Jesus had to die. There was something so different about Him. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by John along with all the people. But a voice from heaven called out: “**This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.**” (Matthew 3:17 NIV) And then the Holy Spirit flew down like a dove, very strong and direct on Jesus. We had heard how the Holy Spirit gave Jesus power like the ancient Jewish King David after he was anointed. But Jesus is the Son of God who “**went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.**” To have Jesus’ disciple Peter in my house preaching this to me and my loved ones filled me with such **powerful peace, peace from God!***

*Peter could actually give eye witness accounts of what he and the other disciples saw with their own eyes. For a soldier to hear from someone who actually saw all this was awesome beyond belief. And the more Peter talked, the more I believed Jesus is the One. My whole family just kept nodding. My wife looked at me and smiled. I had not seen her smile since our baby died. All my friends were so happy as if Peter were giving them a villa filled with gold. Oh, it was gruesome how the Jews in Jerusalem had Jesus crucified, “**but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen...not...by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.**” Imagine that! Peter and the other disciples actually ate and drank with Jesus when He was alive again. Peter was there when Jesus gave orders, “**to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.**” Just then my heart skipped a beat thinking how God would judge me, but Peter added: “**All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.**” (10:40–43)*

That’s what I love about the ancient Jewish religion. Pagan Romans have many gods. You know, Jupiter, Mars, Venus and the rest. But they never really help people. They demand everything and give nothing. And no pagan knows whether we will be better off after death or pushing huge rocks up hill in hell. But the God of the Jews is so forgiving because His own Son was sacrificed not only for the Jewish people but also for all of us Gentiles. His name “Jesus” means “Savior,” yours and mine! Trust in Jesus and eternal life is yours as a free gift of God, just like for me and my whole family.

*I’ve spent the rest of my life enjoying **God’s powerful peace.** I’m looking forward to joining my wife in heaven someday soon, and our little son too. Through tears and losses God keeps giving me joy in Jesus. I heard how Peter was crucified by Emperor Nero. Paul too, the same day. If only those emperors knew what a lowly soldier like me found out that day at my house when Peter came. It’s the story of my life: **A Soldier Finds Justice.** Such kind hearted **Justice** from God! Jesus the Jewish Messiah paid our penalty as promised. He gives us God’s grace. Onward, Christian soldiers! Amen.*