

God Does Not Show Favoritism

✧ **Good News of peace for every nation (vv.34-36)**

✧ **Goodness and healing through Immanuel (vv.37-38)**

In the name of Jesus, God's anointed good pleasure, dear fellow reflectors of His light:

Some things we're so used to that we don't think about them much any more. The awesome miracle of a sunrise doesn't impress you much if you live in a desert. Imagine if the sun went dark for a few days...not knowing if / when it would shine again. What terror some environmentalists are putting on people who don't know the promise of our Creator to Noah: ***"As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."*** (Genesis 8:22 NIV84) The first sunrise after days of darkness would have everyone in the streets celebrating sunshine!

Likewise in your faith life. One simple truth escaped God's people like lead disciple Peter. You're so used to this you'd wonder, "What's the big deal?" Yet without this simple truth, you and I would not be allowed here at all. Let's discover the sermon theme together and find comfort and hope.

✧ **Good News of peace for every nation (vv.34-36)**

This simple truth we just celebrated again at Christmas. On Christmas Eve it was out in the fields of Bethlehem as angels announced the birth of God's own Son to lowly shepherds. Jesus' virgin mother was not a princess or His stepfather even a government official. The Wisemen? We don't even know their names or exactly where they came from. Jesus' Twelve disciples...us today – no one important.

Yet Peter and his fellow Jews were missing the point repeated for centuries by their prophets. Isaiah in our Old Testament reading spoke of ***"coastlands"*** waiting eagerly, ***"nations"*** enlightened, blind eyes opened, prisoners set free. (Isaiah 42:1-7 EHV¹) And what is this ***"just verdict"*** to be announced to ***"the nations"***? God's patience with Peter makes me so grateful for God's patience with me!

Ethnic Jews used Moses' law like a border wall to separate everyone else known as "Gentiles." Centuries of hardened rules isolated the ***"nations."*** A few years ago an Israeli woman scowled at us about going to Bethlehem. Palestinian territory, birthplace of an imposter as far as she was concerned. Millions are still right there with Peter, totally confused by this simple truth. What is God's will for us?

Imagine you haven't eaten anything today, and it's nearly dinner time at noon. You catch great aroma wafting from the kitchen as you fall into a deep trance. A large sheet let down from heaven is gross with disgusting reptiles. A voice says, ***"Kill and eat!"*** Never! But the voice says, ***"What God has cleansed, you stop calling unclean."*** Not once or twice, but three times! Disturbed, deep in thought, the Holy Spirit tells you some Gentiles just arrived. ***"Don't hesitate to go with them, because I have sent them."*** ***"Righteous...God-fearing...highly respected by the whole Jewish nation..."*** – that's how your visitors describe Cornelius, the Roman centurion God told to send for you. Shocking as a war zone.

Strangely, Peter needs help from a Gentile officer of the invading army to get this sermon. This theme goes back to the beginning, down through the centuries of Jewish prophets like Isaiah. Peter's Jewish culture forbids his visit to Cornelius' home. Then Cornelius tells how God heard his prayers and commanded this. ***"So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now then, we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything that the Lord has instructed you to say."*** (10:33)

¹ EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022; also Amazon-Kindle.

Can you sense sunrise on Peter's mind and heart? Can you feel these warm words passing Peter's lips for the very first time? An epiphany for Epiphany: ***"Now I really am beginning to understand that God does not show favoritism, but in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."*** Such simple, profound truth was there all along in the Jewish prophets. God ***"sent his word to the people of Israel, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all."*** Literally, God's Word was ***evangelizing peace*** – telling the wonder of God's forgiveness, not just for Jews, but for us Gentiles too! When this dawns on you – God's deep, eternal love for Jesus' sake – your heart lights up with ***peace*** that surpasses not just human understanding, but all understanding. Your heart swells with God's joy in ***Good News of peace for every nation***. That's why distant ***coastlands*** like America and Africa wait to listen and learn God's glorious instruction. Gracious forgiveness, inclusion as God's people, blind eyes see prisoners of guilt go free in the sunshine! We all inherit this priceless gift:

☆ **Goodness and healing through Immanuel (vv.37-38)**

Cornelius must have been nodding precious memories as Peter spoke: ***"You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached. God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the holy Spirit and with power. He went round doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the Devil, because God was with him."*** Jesus received the same Holy Spirit in His baptism as we do. In His State of Humiliation on earth, Jesus needed the Holy Spirit and power poured on Him to do the ***good working*** that freed people from the oppressive guilt which the liar from hell dumps on souls. After tempting us with sinful pleasure, Satan torments us with guilt. What looks so harmless, as if "no one will be hurt," ends up killing you and hurting those you love. Worst of all, sin angers God.

That's where the ***"just verdict"*** would crush us all. ***God Does Not Show Favoritism***. His moral law demands infinite love for God and our neighbor. No matter how convinced some are that their lifestyle is good and natural, if God's Word condemns it, it's damning, disastrous, destructive. And ***"our God is a consuming fire."*** (Hebrews 12:29) Who could ever love a God like that – unless...?

What if God's own Son willingly put Himself under God's wrath to pay the penalty for all our perversion – including prejudice, bigotry, cultural bias, selfish, sinful pleasure? What if God made a gift of our guilt by giving us His righteousness, holiness, absolute satisfaction of all His demands – for you, for me, for all? Wouldn't that be the greatest news you'd ever heard? Peter heard it on the Galilean shore as Jesus forgive and reinstated him. Now Peter is hearing this is good for Gentiles too. He will have to answer for visiting Cornelius, but his fellow Jews back in Jerusalem need the theme of this sermon as well: ***God Does Not Show Favoritism***. He gives ***Goodness and healing through Immanuel***. As God was with Jesus, so Jesus as ***Immanuel*** is "God with us," freeing our oppressed souls. Jews and Gentiles are adopted into God's family through baptism. You belong to God. He put His name on you. God's ***"sun of righteousness"*** (Malachi 4:2) scatters darkness with this ***"just verdict"***: Not guilty! for Jesus' sake.

There's a Christian family from the Netherlands that kept a strange souvenir for generations. A newlywed pastor once picked it out of the ashes where the only son of his widow-bride had been burned. The Roman Catholic Inquisition was having trouble with Protestant martyrs. They would not break under torture. As they burned in the fire, they kept preaching about Christ-crucified and risen, the Savior of all. So the authorities invented a "tongue screw" clamp that left just the tip of the tongue exposed. A red hot iron would make the tongue swell to keep the clamp in place until all life was gone from the body.²

Can you hear how loudly this sermon was preached in that family by that souvenir? Can you hear the Epiphany question for us: What's got your tongue? God's kindness in Christ is still our consolation. ***"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*** (Psalm 139:23f NIV84) Shine your light, O LORD! God of grace and goodness for Jesus' sake. Amen.

² Morgan, Robert J. *On This Day* © 1997. (Thomas Nelson, Inc.). DailyReader © 1999-2001. Wheeler, Rairdin. Laridian. For *The Preacher's Apprentice (TPA)* sermon study or copies: m.cordes@comast.net . New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church You can also call: 651-484-1169. Hear the sermon at www.wels.us/newlife . 180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126