

To God Alone Be The Glory

Think about some of the army recruitment slogans you've heard or seen. The latest is "What's Your Warrior?" Before that it was "Warriors Wanted." Before that it was "Army Strong" for 12 years. Then there was the short-lived "An Army of One," which didn't make near as much sense as the slogan that lasted 21 years before that: "Be All [that] You Can Be." There were others, but the one that sticks in the memory of so many Americans is the Uncle Sam poster. Do you remember? A white-haired gentleman dressed in a white top hat with a blue overcoat and a stern look on his face was pointing at you with that bony finger. The caption read, "I want you for [the] U.S. Army." No matter where you stood, the Uncle Sam poster kept looking at you and pointing at you. "I want you for [the] U.S. army."

Now morph the picture in your mind. Let the face change from Uncle Sam to Jesus. The stern look on his face softens. His eyes are full of love, and he's wearing a smile. Jesus isn't pointing at you with a bony finger. Instead he's got both arms outstretched to you. Look closely at his hands and see the scars where his palms join to his wrists. He's the Lord and Savior of all. The sentence at the bottom of the poster has been shortened: "I want you," Jesus says. No matter where you stand, Jesus still looks at you with those loving eyes and those outstretched arms, and he says, "I want you."

In Acts 10, from which today's sermon text comes, we are introduced to a man named Cornelius. I don't know what kind of recruitment poster the Roman army used, but Cornelius had answered the call to arms. He had been in the Roman army long enough to become a centurion, a commander of 100 soldiers. (It took six centurions and their men to make up one cohort or regiment of 600. And there were ten cohorts in a legion of 6000.)

Cornelius and his men were shipped off to Palestine. While serving there he apparently made friends with some outreach-minded Jews, who shared their faith in the coming Messiah, the Anointed One. Cornelius believed that the God of the Jews wanted him to have forgiveness and eternal life. Acts describes Cornelius this way: "*He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly*" (Acts 10:2). That's what happens when the Holy Spirit gives you saving faith. Your faith can't be hidden. It shines forth, in devotion to God, prayer, acts of kindness, or other goodness. Cornelius had shared his faith with all his family. The Greek word for 'family' would have been better translated 'household.' His household included more than his wife and children; Cornelius shared his faith with his soldiers and his slaves too. The phrase "*devout and God-fearing*" is New Testament code for a "convert to Judaism who had not yet been circumcised." In almost every way Cornelius had become a Jewish believer.

One day at 3:00 P.M., when all the Jews would normally stop what they were doing and say their prayers, Cornelius had a vision. This was not a dream. An angel actually appeared to him, told him that his acts of faith had been noticed by the Lord, and instructed him to send for the apostle Peter who was staying about 30 miles away. Cornelius called for two of his servants and one of his soldiers, all of whom were fellow believers. He told them what he had seen and sent them to get Peter.

As those three came near the home where Peter was staying, Peter was praying. It was near noon, and Peter was hungry. All of a sudden he saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners. The sheet opened up and allowed Peter to see that it contained all kinds of animals and reptiles. ¹³*“Then a voice told him, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’* ¹⁴*‘Surely not, Lord!’ Peter replied. ‘I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.’”* Remember that God had restricted the meat portion of the diet of Old Testament believers to certain birds like chickens and certain animals like cows and sheep. And this sheet contained unclean animals. ¹⁵*“The voice spoke to [Peter] a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”* ¹⁶*This [vision] happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.”* Do you see what the Lord was doing? He was getting Jewish Peter ready for the visit of these

three Gentile servants of the Gentile Cornelius. You see, the Jews were taught that all Gentiles were unclean. So Jews did not associate with unclean Gentiles.

When Cornelius’ men arrived and called out for Peter, the Holy Spirit said to Peter, ¹⁹*“Simon, three men are looking for you. 20...Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”* Imagine Peter’s mind connecting the dots between ‘the unclean animals in his vision’ and ‘these Gentiles.’ So Peter, who had never before eaten anything unclean or associated with any unclean Gentiles, invited these Gentiles into the house as his guests.

The next day they head back to Cornelius. The return trip takes a day and a half of walking. When they arrive at Cornelius’ house, it isn’t just Cornelius and his family and his servants. No, no, no. This Cornelius, who doesn’t even know who the Messiah is, has called together his relatives and close friends. Acts describes the group as a large gathering of people (v. 27). How do you like that! I wish I were even half as good as Cornelius at outreach. I wish I were less afraid of what people might say when I invite them to know Jesus better. **THE LORD OF ALL WANTS YOU** and me to share the gospel with anyone and everyone. Cornelius doesn’t even know the gospel yet, and he’s already inviting people to hear the gospel. God be praised for people like Cornelius.

When Peter enters the house, he tells the crowd, ²⁸*“You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. ²⁹So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”*

Cornelius explains his vision and then says, ³³*“So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”* God be praised for people like Cornelius. He demonstrates that **THE LORD OF ALL WANTS** us to listen to the gospel eagerly.

³⁴*Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵but accepts those from every nation who fear him and do what is right.* The Lord of all does not show favoritism. The Lord of all makes no distinction between religious backgrounds or nationalities (often called races) when it comes to deciding who can hear the gospel. **THE LORD OF ALL WANTS YOU** to do the same. So every sinner is welcome at St. John’s.

Peter says, ³⁶*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.* Peace through Jesus. You know this peace. It’s that spiritual calmness about where we stand with God. We have no need to be terrified of God, even though he is holy and we have sinned

much. We need not be afraid of God. God erased all sin from our record, transferred all sin to Jesus’ record, and had him pay the penalty for us.

This peace is really important. Too many people, even Christians, carry around guilt for sins they committed. Sin is such a heavy burden that lots of people try to pretend they don’t care about the guilt. But all the fun or work or food or drugs they distract themselves with just prove how heavy a burden sin is. It’s not enough to try harder tomorrow. It’s not enough to do some good as a kind of balance for the bad we’ve done. Stop trying to work for God’s favor. **THE LORD OF ALL WANTS YOU** to have the peace he won for you. It’s a gift. So he says, “I’ll trade you: my peace for your sin.” Thank you, Lord! That’s a good deal!

Peter knows that the Lord of all wants his listeners to have this peace. So he reviews some current events with them. ³⁷*You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—³⁸show God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”* The devil had a right to enslave sinners and to haul them off to hell. But Jesus’ attitude was, “No way, Bucco!” He broke the devil’s power by healing many

illnesses and casting out demons and especially by leading people to trust in him for a right standing with God. **THE LORD OF ALL WANTS YOU** to have the peace he won.

And now that you have his peace, **THE LORD OF ALL WANTS YOU** to be devoted to him. Cornelius is a great example. He demonstrates that you don't have to be a Bible scholar with deep knowledge of the doctrines in order to be devoted to the Lord. Before Peter's visit, all Cornelius knew was that Israel had the true God, that the Lord would someday send the Messiah, the Anointed One, to rescue Israel. Yes, Cornelius had heard about a miracle worker named Jesus. But Jesus had died, and apparently Cornelius thought Jesus was still dead. So Peter filled in the rest of the story. Jesus Christ had risen from death, demonstrating that Jesus Christ was indeed the very Messiah that Cornelius was waiting for, the Anointed One. The Holy Spirit had anointed Jesus at his baptism.

Now Cornelius knew the whole truth. Now he could base his devotion to God on knowledge. We also know the whole truth. Let's not keep back any part of ourselves from serving the Lord. Our time, our mind, our lips, our abilities, our money—it all gets to serve the Lord. Let's have full respect for the Lord and do what is right in his sight. **THE LORD OF ALL WANTS YOU** to

be devoted to him.

THE LORD OF ALL also **WANTS YOU** to share the gospel with the world. Let's be like Peter who went with Cornelius' men when he was asked. Let's act as if people from every national background are equal. Let's say to ourselves about each person we meet, "For this one too Jesus died. I will show love and share what I know about Jesus as opportunities present themselves."

Let's be like Cornelius who brought his friends and relatives together to hear about Jesus. It doesn't matter that we haven't had a vision or some sensational spiritual experience. We have something better: the Bible itself, God's message to people. If we read or listen to it regularly, we can live according to it with God's help, and we can share the wisdom we find there in a loving way.

Keep trying to cultivate friendships in hopes that some of our friends will want to know the Jesus who has given us so much peace. It's wonderful to have Jesus' peace. We want everyone to have his peace. Keep trying to cultivate the ability to tell others what it means that Jesus rescued us from sin. And let's support mission work with generous mission offerings, like Cornelius did. Let's make this a high priority. **THE LORD OF ALL WANTS YOU** and me to share the gospel with the world.