

# But God Raised Him

Easter 2017

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Acts 10:34-43

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Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The First Reading for Easter seems out of place. It requires review of what has happened previously, learning of what happened in between those events and the events in the reading itself, and then introduction into it.

When we left off on Friday morning and evening, Peter had denied Jesus three times. Pilate had relented to the people and given Jesus over to them to crucify Him, though he himself had found no fault in him. And Jesus was crucified, suffered hell itself—separation from God the Father—on the cross, before uttering the words, “It is finished,” and dying.

Since that time, Jesus has been resurrected—more on that later—Peter has been restored by a word from Him, and a man named Cornelius has been introduced. Our text may begin in verse thirty-four, but the account begins at the beginning of chapter ten. “At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort.” This man Cornelius was a Roman officer in charge of about six hundred men. He was an Italian.

He was also “a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continuously to God. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, ‘Cornelius.’ And he stared at him in terror and said, ‘What is it, Lord?’ And he (the angel) said to him, ‘Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter.’”

The next day, Peter received a vision of a sheet being lowered from heaven three times, and the Lord God telling him, “‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’” Shortly after his vision, Peter is called on by Cornelius’ men. Following the command of God, Peter goes with them to meet Cornelius.

But *what*, exactly, does this have to do with *Easter*? Well, that, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, and any and all visitors we may have, is what we’ll look at now.

## Verse 1

Cornelius explains his purpose in summoning Peter, to which Peter replies, “‘Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. As for the word he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened...’”

Now don’t get the wrong impression, our text is not saying that good works save. Remember that in introducing Cornelius, he was terrified at the presence of the angel of the Lord. He knew that he was a sinner who didn’t deserve to be in the presence of even a representative of God. Yet, like with Rahab, God wasn’t going to let him die in ignorance of the Word concerning His Savior Jesus Christ. Rahab, a person from the account of Joshua in the Old Testament, had heard about the mighty works of God and hid the spies of Israel, and God had spared her so that she might hear of the Promised One to come, and she herself had ended up in His genealogy. So, too, Cornelius had knowledge of God, but it was incomplete, and God had him send to meet Peter.

God doesn't want you to die in incomplete knowledge or ignorance of His Savior Jesus Christ, either. He has prepared you to hear the Word this morning so that you might not be terrified by your sins any longer. And He desires this not just for you, but for all people, no matter your or their race or socioeconomic status.

Up to this time, though, it had not been ritually acceptable for “a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but,” Peter says, “God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.” The same is true for us today. We should not refuse to proclaim the Easter message of salvation to anyone.

“As for the word (God) sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened...”

### Verse 2

“...throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.”

There! There's the Easter proclamation! Jesus, who had performed great signs and miracles in His earthly life, and who suffered and died at the hands of sinful human beings, God has raised from the dead! He is risen, He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

But this news is much more than just a saying that we like to say. It is more than just an historical account. It is not something which only happened two thousand years ago and has nothing to do with you today. Jesus died on the cross at the hands of sinners, suffering the price of sin for all people—not just the people of His day, but for the people of our day, too. He died paying the price that you rightly deserved to pay for your sins which you have committed in this current time. He took separation from God the Father in your place so that you won't have to.

You know this to be true. You know that you have done things which are not right to have done. You know that you have left things undone which you rightly should have done. Yet it goes so much further than that. You are a sinner from your very birth. All of humankind was lost in the darkness of sin since its beginning. And your sin rightly deserved the full punishment of the Law—separation from God for all of eternity in pain and suffering. That is what you deserved—deserved, past tense.

You no longer deserve it, but not because of anything you have done. You will no longer have to bear that punishment of the Law because of the good news of peace: that Jesus bore that price for you, and more than that, He was raised from the dead on this very day. But don't just take my word for it: you heard the word from God Himself through the witnesses He prepared to share the word, even Peter who we hear proclaiming the word to Cornelius in this very account.

### Verse 3

God has raised Jesus from the dead, and He is risen indeed, Alleluia! “And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Here in our account, Peter was already fulfilling that word. He was preaching that Easter Gospel, but not just to anyone, but to Gentiles. This would be the beginning of the Church as we know it: preaching and teaching God's Word—His Law, and how we have not kept it, and especially the Gospel, that Jesus has paid the price and we are forgiven on His account. But again, this message would no longer, and is no longer preached only to the people of Israel—though it certainly made its way to Rahab and other Gentiles in the past—but also to people of every nation, that is, the Gentiles.

Our history bears that out. No matter what descent you are from, you have heard the Gospel, even if today is your first day hearing it. All the prophets and accounts of the Old Testament bore witness to what Jesus would do when He came; and the New Testament displays God's awesome power worked through Jesus. He healed many, raised some from the dead, and preached and taught the people; though the most important thing He did was to die and rise again. He died for your sins and was raised by God the Father to show that you will rise, too.

Everyone who believes in His name “receives forgiveness of sins through his name,” yet if Jesus had not been raised from the dead, our faith would be in vain. We of all people would be the ones most deserving pity. Thanks be to God, who raised Jesus from the dead, had Him show Himself to Peter and all the witnesses, and who has welcomed all people of every race and socioeconomic status to hear that Easter Gospel: He is risen, He is risen indeed, Alleluia! And your sins are forgiven in Him. In Jesus' Name. Amen.