

Biggest Loser 5

Sometimes a person has to lose to win especially when it comes to weight and good physical health. Millions, maybe billions, of dollars are spent annually on diets and programs designed to help people get slim and healthy. But, it's really a lot simpler and cheaper than all that. Eat less, eat right, and exercise more. (saved you some money!)

There was something the early church needed to lose in order to continue being healthy: Elitism or you could even call it prejudice. They, the early Jewish Christians, thought that Jesus came only to redeem them, that He was only their Messiah. Today's study reveals a great and powerful lesson learned through Peter regarding who can come to Christ and join His church.

1 There was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment. **2** He was a devout man and feared God along with his whole household. He did many charitable deeds for the [Jewish] people and always prayed to God. **3** At about three in the afternoon he distinctly saw in a vision an angel of God who came in and said to him, "Cornelius!" **4** Looking intently at him, he became afraid and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he told him, "Your prayers and your acts of charity have come up as a memorial offering before God. **5** Now send men to Joppa and call for Simon, who is also named Peter. **6** He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." **7** When the angel who spoke to him had gone, he called two of his household servants and a

devout soldier, who was one of those who attended him. ⁸
After explaining everything to them, he sent them to
Joppa. Acts 10:1-8 (HCSB)

Cornelius was definitely not a Jew. He was an Italian serving in the occupying Roman army. How is it that he came to such belief, devotion and service to the God of the Jews? We must conclude that the Jewish residents of Caesarea had, instead of treating Cornelius as a foreign invader with contempt and hatred as I'm sure some had done, they showed respect and kindness which opened the way to him accepting and believing in Jehova God. How could this have happened? Didn't one have to be born a Jew to be of the Jewish faith? No! The lineage of Jesus included Ruth, a Moabite, who was the grandmother of David.

There was always provision in the Jewish law for one who would become a spiritual Jew. And whether Cornelius had officially become a Jew or not is not the important thing. The important thing is that he had come to embrace, believe in and serve the one true creator, sovereign God. But he, like the Jews he had come to love and respect, had not yet accepted Jesus as Messiah. So God, in His infinite wisdom, chose to speak to this non-Jew (gentile) in Caesarea in a personal and powerful way with the purpose of getting him and Peter together so Peter could lead him, his family, and friends to salvation.

Cornelius did not hesitate to respond to and obey God's instruction. He immediately called two servants which were likely Jews, and one devout soldier who was likely a gentile and sent them to find Peter who, according to Acts 9, was in Joppa

around 30 miles to the south. Both Caesarea and Joppa were coastal cities on the western shore of the Mediterranean Sea.

9 The next day, as they were traveling and nearing the city, Peter went up to pray on the housetop at about noon. **10** Then he became hungry and wanted to eat, but while they were preparing something he went into a visionary state. **11** He saw heaven opened and an object coming down that resembled a large sheet being lowered to the earth by its four corners. **12** In it were all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth, and the birds of the sky. **13** Then a voice said to him, **"Get up, Peter; kill and eat!"** **14** "No, Lord!" Peter said. "For I have never eaten anything common and unclean!" **15** Again, a second time, a voice said to him, **"What God has made clean, you must not call common."** **16** This happened three times, and then the object was taken up into heaven. **Acts 10:9-16 (HCSB)**

Do you see all the detail and effort God went to just to get these two men together? The one true God who maintains and oversees the entire universe, in perfect timing and wisdom, orchestrated a man to man meeting that would quickly turn the Christian movement among Jews into a worldwide, everyone is welcome, outreach for the kingdom of God. This would take a pretty profound change of thinking among the Jewish apostles and followers of Christ.

17 While Peter was deeply perplexed about what the vision he had seen might mean, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions to Simon's house, stood

at the gate. ¹⁸ They called out, asking if Simon, who was also named Peter, was lodging there. ¹⁹ While Peter was thinking about the vision, the Spirit told him, "Three men are here looking for you. ²⁰ Get up, go downstairs, and accompany them with no doubts at all, because I have sent them." ²¹ Then Peter went down to the men and said, "Here I am, the one you're looking for. What is the reason you're here?" ²² They said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who has a good reputation with the whole Jewish nation, was divinely directed by a holy angel to call you to his house and to hear a message from you." ²³ Peter then invited them in and gave them lodging. The next day he got up and set out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went with him. Acts 10:17-23 (HCSB)

Do you think Peter was confused? We can be quite sure that, up to that point, it had not even crossed Peter's, or the other apostle's, minds that the message of Christ and His offer of salvation should be made available to everyone, not just the Jews. For centuries there had been a prevailing mentality among Jews that they were the chosen ones of God and this place of privilege was a birthright guaranteed by the fact that they simply were descendents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

I'm sure this wasn't the case with all Jews but it is profoundly evident that it was common thinking among the Jewish leaders and probably much of the people. This spiritual elitism was part of what kept many from seeing and believing that Jesus was Messiah.

Peter's understanding of the vision and his obedience to God to go with the three men sent by Cornelius to Caesarea was world-changing. What if Peter had just remained confused? What if he had decided to wait a while and think about it? What if he had flat refused to travel with a Roman soldier and go to the home of a gentile?

24 The following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. **25** When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, fell at his feet, and worshiped him. **26** But Peter helped him up and said, "Stand up! I myself am also a man." **27** While talking with him, he went on in and found that many had come together there. **28** Peter said to them, "You know it's forbidden for a Jewish man to associate with or visit a foreigner. But God has shown me that I must not call any person common or unclean. **29** That's why I came without any objection when I was sent for. So I ask, 'Why did you send for me?'" **30** Cornelius replied, "Four days ago at this hour, at three in the afternoon, I was praying in my house. Just then a man in a dazzling robe stood before me **31** and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your acts of charity have been remembered in God's sight. **32** Therefore send someone to Joppa and invite Simon here, who is also named Peter. He is lodging in Simon the tanner's house by the sea.' **33** Therefore I immediately sent for you, and you did the right thing in coming. So we are all present before God, to hear everything you have been commanded by the Lord."

Acts 10:17-33 (HCSB)

Wow, what Peter may have started out not thinking was much of a big deal must have been a shock. Cornelius' heavenly vision was so perfectly entwined Peter's own that there could be no doubt that God was up to something significant. This was obviously becoming more and more evident to Peter as everything transpired..... Peter's statement, "You know it's forbidden for a Jewish man to associate with or visit a foreigner. But God has shown me that I must not call any person common or unclean." Shows both the prevailing thinking of Jewish elitism and the beginning of Peter's changing thoughts toward who should receive the gospel.

34 Then Peter began to speak: "In truth, I understand that God doesn't show favoritism, **35** but in every nation the person who fears Him and does righteousness is acceptable to Him. **36** He sent the message to the sons of Israel, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all.**A**cts 10:34-36 (HCSB)

God favored the Jews because of their faith not because of who their father was. God loves everyone and wants everyone to be saved.

3 This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, **4** who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. **1** Tim 2:2-4 (HCSB)

Then Peter gave a short and simple gospel presentation.

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message. **45**

The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in [other] languages and declaring the greatness of God. Then Peter responded, ⁴⁷ "Can anyone withhold water and prevent these from being baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" ⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for a few days. Acts 10:44-48 (HCSB)

They had church right there in Cornelius home. It doesn't look like they did any singing but Peter preached and it looks like the whole assembly got saved and were immediately obedient by being baptized.

And this was a bunch of gentiles/non-Jews. They had never done it that way before and the reason was they, the apostles, had never considered that God so loved the whole world that He gave His only Son so that whoever believed in Him would be saved including the gentiles.

Peter and those Jewish believers who were with him were astounded.

Venezuela- First home/friends and neighbors/some saved. I was astounded at the readiness of those people to hear and respond to the gospel.

1 The apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles had welcomed God's

message also. ² When Peter went up to Jerusalem, those who stressed circumcision argued with him, ³ saying, “You visited uncircumcised men and ate with them!” Acts 11:1-3 (HCSB)

This is even more evidence of the common incorrect thinking that Messiah came strictly for the Jews. They couldn't believe that Peter even visited, much less ate with, much less shared the gospel with gentiles. How dare he do such a thing!

⁴ Peter began to explain to them in an orderly sequence, saying: Acts 11:4 (HCSB)

He basically told them the whole story. What was recorded in Acts 10 as it happened to Peter and Cornelius, is reiterated in chapter 11 in Peter's report to the church in Jerusalem.

¹⁸ When they heard this they became silent. Then they glorified God, saying, “So God has granted repentance resulting in life to even the Gentiles!” Acts 11:1-18 (HCSB)

Healthy churches: are full of people like Peter who.....

Keep divine appointments no matter how strange, uncomfortable or far. Don't you think Peter was uncomfortable? Don't you think every step Peter took closer to Caesarea and the home of a gentile that his heart began to beat faster and stride more hesitant? But he kept going. He showed up. He spoke. And God did a marvelous and wonderful thing through him.

You and I must be open to opportunities God opens up for us as we go through our day. There are a lot of people like Cornelius who are wide open to the gospel. They just need a messenger. Would you be a Peter?

Reach out to all people. Regardless of whether they live in the NE, NW, SE or SW, whether they are rich or poor, wear a suit or shorts, and whether they are anglo, Hispanic, African, Asian or Arab.

My greatest offense as a child in church- (1960+) the church voting whether or not to allow people of color to come in. With that which I had accumulated in my young mind of the teachings of Christ, I could not see any way that we should do anything but open the doors with arms open wide and say “come on in.” Why were we even voting?

Jesus didn't say “go into all the world and pick out which people you think would make ideal disciples and church members, whoa re just like you, and ignore or shun the rest.” He said “make disciples.” Period.

You are Welcome! In this church and even more importantly in God's family.

³ This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ¹ Tim 2:2-4 (HCSB)

No matter who you are, what you've done, your age, gender or race, God loves you and is offering you, right here and right

now, the opportunity to be eternally born into His family. Just come. Come...

*Receive Him as your Savior and Lord.

*Join this local family by transferring your membership.

*Join by statement that you know Christ as your Savior and have been baptized according to scripture.