

Think about it! (12)

It would be hard to deny the fact that according to the source of Christian beliefs – i. e. the Bible – the fundamental message of Christianity is a message of salvation. But that message has been eroded by the undermining of the only thing that gives meaning to the word 'salvation': namely, a prior 'lostness' – if there is no such 'lostness', what does the term 'salvation' mean?; salvation from what, and for whom?

Cornelius was a Roman soldier; in fact he was a centurion – in other words, he had under his command a whole company of soldiers. (You can read his story in the Bible – in the book of 'Acts of the Apostles', chapter 10.)

Everything that the Bible tells us about Cornelius is very positive, very favourable: (1) "he and all his family were devout and God-fearing" ('Acts' 10:2a); (2) "he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly" ('Acts' 10:2b); (3) he had a vision in which an angel told him that God had taken note of his prayers and his charity ('Acts' 10:3-4); (4) when the angel told him to invite the Apostle Peter to his home, Cornelius did so straight away ('Acts' 10:5-8); (5) the men sent by Cornelius to the Apostle Peter spoke very highly of their 'boss' to Peter ('Acts' 10:21-22); (6) Cornelius managed to get together a good turnout of family and friends in readiness for the apostolic visit ('Acts' 10:24-27); (7) Cornelius and his family and friends waited with a great sense of expectancy to hear Peter preach ('Acts' 10:33).

Who would have imagined that Cornelius and his folk were (spiritually) 'lost', that they needed to be saved?! But that is exactly what the biblical account tells us; when Peter, following his stay first in Joppa and then in Cornelius' home in Caesarea, was back in Jerusalem, he told everybody what had happened, and said, among other things, that the angel who had spoken to Cornelius had said to him, "Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved" ('Acts' 11:13-14). In other words, the angel had told Cornelius that through the words preached by Peter he (Cornelius) and his household would be saved, which, logically, implies that before they heard Peter's words they were still 'lost'!

This (true) story teaches us three really important lessons about the subject of salvation: (1) a person may be good, generous, religious and even devout, and yet be spiritually 'lost' – like Cornelius, before he heard the message of the gospel; (2) in order for a person to be saved, they need to hear, understand and believe the message of the gospel – that's why the Lord Jesus Christ sent out his followers to preach the gospel to everybody; and (3) the number one mission of the Christian Church is precisely that: to preach the gospel – in other words, to communicate as faithfully as possible that message about the Lord Jesus Christ.

All of this leads me to bring this reflection to a conclusion by asking you three personal questions: (1) have you been saved, or are you still 'lost'?; (2) have you heard, understood and believed the message of the gospel?; and (3) if you are a Christian, what are you doing to help to make known to other people the message of salvation in Christ?

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