

Easter 2
May 1, 2011

Peace From Proof: Christ *is* Risen

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Acts 10:36-44

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I want you to think of a time when you had to talk to someone, but you didn't know where you stood with that person. I know you've all been in that situation.

If you're married, I'm sure you can remember a time when you were going to go talk to your spouse, but you didn't know if they were mad at you or not. Maybe you got in a fender-bender, and talked very briefly on the phone. Now you're going to talk in person. Are they mad? Or will they be understanding and just happy that no one was hurt? Or you forgot your anniversary. Will they be mad or not?

Or at work... you're going in for your annual review, and your mind is racing. "Where do I stand? Will this be a good review or a bad review?"

Or kids, you bring your report card home. How will Mom and Dad react to it? Will they be happy with your work, or not so much?

In each of these cases, the feeling is the same, isn't it? You go into the meeting or the discussion with apprehension and anxiety. When you don't know your standing with a person, you don't have peace as you about to engage that person in conversation.

Now let me ask you this. Do you now or have you felt the same way before God? Because of what you've done, thought, said... because of misplaced priorities, broken relationships, failings and shortcomings, do you sometimes wonder about your standing with God? When you fall into that pet sin of yours ... *yet again*... do you worry and fret about your standing with God?

If not knowing your standing with a person robs you of peace in that particular relationship, you better believe that not knowing your standing with God will rob you of peace in your relationship with him. And since your relationship with God is at the hub and center of your life... if you don't have peace there, you won't have peace anywhere in your life.

And so, whether we realize it or not, what we need more than anything else is absolute confidence in knowing our standing with God is good. If we know it is good, then we will have peace. And peace in our relationship with God will give us peace in every other facet of our lives too. So let's figure out today if we can know our standing with God and so get peace with God.

The text that will answer the question for us is in Acts 10. We don't have time to look at the whole story, so, as usual, you'll have to do a little reading on your own at home to get all the details. But here's the short version:

In this story we meet a Roman centurion named Cornelius and his family. Cornelius was a convert to Judaism. He didn't believe in many gods like his fellow Romans. He knew the God of the Bible and believed in him. He believed that the Jewish people were God's chosen nation to whom the Messiah would be born. But what Cornelius didn't yet know was that Jesus was the promised Messiah, and that he had risen from the dead. It appear Cornelius knew *of* Jesus, but didn't yet know of his resurrection, and therefore did not trust in him as his Savior.

Now, coupled with this is another underlying thread. As a convert to Judaism, but himself a Gentile, was the salvation offered by this Jewish Messiah, this Jewish Savior, even applicable to him? If Jesus only came to save his own people, it wouldn't matter if Cornelius knew and believed in him. Now this seems so obvious to us today, but this was an issue the early church wrestled with.

Now, one more interesting fact before we look at the message Peter spoke to the house of Cornelius that day. Cornelius was a man who did all sorts of good works. Acts 10:2 says: **“He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.”** If anyone should have had a good standing with God, it was Cornelius. He truly trusted God, he prayed and he was very generous in helping the poor. Great! He's set, right? He's not lacking anything! What a great example he is! This is how God wants us to live. So this must be where the story ends, right? This must be where we add a bit of application: Go and do the same in your life: Trust God with all your heart. Pray regularly. Give to those in need, and your standing with God is good!

Except... that's not where the story ends. In fact, this is where the story begins... we're only in verse 2 of chapter 10. God speaks to Cornelius in a vision, and lets him know he's missing something very important. His standing with God is *not* right. He needs to invite a man named Peter to his house, and he's going to fill in the blank as to what is missing, and why he does *not* yet have peace with God.

Now let's pause there. In our relationship with God, we tend to be in one of two camps. Either we're thinking, “I surely do not have peace with God because of all the bad things I have done. I do not know my standing with God. I don't know how he feels about me right now. All I can think about is how *I* would feel if I were God. And that's what scares me.” If you're in that first camp, you already know that you need help from God. You're just not sure God gives that help to you because of who you are and what you've done. We'll address that in a minute.

But here's the other camp we gravitate towards: “I'm pretty sure things between me and God must be good. Because I'm a hard worker. I try very hard at being a good [fill in the blank] mother/father; son/daughter; employee/employer. I try to help others and be encouraging and conscientious. I try to be generous. I'm not a bad person at all! Surely, my standing with God can't be bad at all! He must be pretty happy.”

If you're in the second camp, you're standing there with Cornelius. And God said to Cornelius, “You're missing something vitally important for a relationship with me!” And God says to you, “You're missing something vitally important for a relationship with me!” You don't have what God's looking for. You've fallen short. If you think that on your own you can stand confident before God, you're wrong!

So, what's lacking? What do we need to be able stand confident before God and have peace in our lives? Listen to the message Peter had for Cornelius that day, and we find the answer:

Acts 10:36-44 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.) You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how 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.

What Cornelius was lacking was an understanding and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now what's interesting is that Cornelius apparently *did* know something about him. He had already heard about John the Baptist, and Jesus teaching, and his healings, and power over the devil. Cornelius had heard this much, and apparently thought of Jesus as a respectable rabbi who was a good teacher, a good man, and a charismatic speaker. But Cornelius had not heard the conclusion to the Jesus story. And that's what Peter shares next.

Peter says: **“We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree.”** I wonder if Jesus' death was news to Cornelius or if he had heard about *it* too. At the very least what must have struck him was this strange ending to Jesus' life: In spite of being anointed by God, and having the power of the Holy Spirit, in spite of fulfilling all the prophecies, and healing many people... even raising some from the dead... Peter says, they killed him by hanging him on a tree. They crucified him. He died. Cornelius didn't have time to contemplate this tragic ending of Jesus' life, because it wasn't the end at all. Peter doesn't pause here like I just did:

They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

Peter wants the Roman centurion to understand one thing very clearly: Jesus was killed, but he came back to life. Jesus was killed, but he came back to life. Jesus was killed but he came back to life. How do we know this for sure? We saw him! We're eye witnesses. And we didn't imagine it. We ate with him. We touched him. He was real. He really was killed and he really did come back to life.

Now, what does this all mean? Because Christ is indeed risen, Peter can conclude with this statement:

He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.

So Peter is saying, “Now listen, Cornelius, do you really want to know your standing with God? Do you want peace with God? Then know this. The Lord Jesus Christ is the one appointed by God to judge the living and the dead. What will his judgment be? Will he be declared right with God, or lacking? Here's the key: *Through the name of Jesus, through faith in him, you receive the forgiveness of all your sins.*”

Friends, revealed here is the key to knowing your standing with God. It's not through your work, through your performance, through your best efforts. No matter how hard we try, we are not as holy as God is, and we fall short of his perfect expectations. You can do your very best and try your very hardest, but at the end of the day, if you are brutally honest, you will still find places where you could have done better. And the sobering reality is this: God finds those placed even better than you can. You know where you've fallen short. How much more so does God know!

The key to having peace with God and peace in your life is not found in you. It is found in his one and only Son, Jesus Christ. God's anointed, the fulfiller of prophecies, the Savior of the World. He took your sin debt and paid it in full on the cross of Calvary. Those of you who were here on Good Friday know just how great that payment was.

But here is the key to our peace: Jesus Christ rose from the dead. And he proved it time and again, appearing to hundreds of witnesses on many different occasions over a period of 40 days so we can know beyond all doubt that Jesus is who he said he was: The Son of God. He did what he said he would do: remove the guilt of all our sins by giving his life as a ransom payment. And he'll give the reward he claimed he could give: eternal life to all who believe in him.

In Christ Jesus you do have peace with God. In Christ, the Father smiles on you, loves you, accepts you and holds you close. There is no doubt about your standing with God. And when you know that through Christ you have peace with God, the peace fills your heart and life... a peace that truly is beyond all human understanding. This peace doesn't come from you, it comes from God through Christ Jesus. That means the peace is certain. And it is forever. Peace *is* yours from God our Father through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Rejoice! And share this good news of peace with others. Amen.

Thank you, Father, for establishing peace with us through Jesus. You didn't owe it to us, but you gave it to us because you love us, and you proved it is ours by raising Jesus from the dead. Help us to truly know this peace in our lives, and to share this peace with everyone. In Jesus' name. Amen.