

Christ in Prophecy
Profiles 1: "Profiles in Righteousness - Cornelius"

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Dave Reagan: Welcome to Tel Aviv Israel and the beautiful Mediterranean Sea. I'm Dave Reagan senior evangelist for Lamb and Lion ministries. We've come here to Israel to do a series of programs entitled, *Profiles in Righteousness*. We're going to take a look at people like the prophet Elijah, king David of Judah, but we're going to begin with a man by the name of Cornelius. A Roman soldier who was the first Gentile convert to Christianity. To begin that story, we need to go about a mile south of here, to the ancient port of Jaffa.

Well here we are at the entrance of the ancient port city of Jaffa known in Hebrew as Yafo. I wanted to pause here at the entrance to the city to show you an object behind me. It is a clock tower, one of three built by the Turks in the early 20th century when this area was part of the Ottoman Empire. This one was constructed in 1906. One was located in Acre, a port city on the Mediterranean coast north of here near the Lebanese border. The other believe it or not was located on top of the Jaffa gate in the old city of Jerusalem. This one is the only one of the three that remains. The Turks built these clock towers to emphasize that they were a modern, western type culture that was very time conscious. Well, folks, let me tell you something, the clock towers didn't help. They continued to be as unconscious of time as they were before the towers were built. Well, not far from here, in fact, just around the corner, is the ancient port city of Jaffa that has been transformed today into a beautiful tourist area that is full of shops and all kinds of artist studios. Let's go there.

Well, here we are at the old port of Jaffa. And just up the steps in front of me is a narrow lane that leads through some picturesque shops. It leads to the very top of a hill where we can get a great view of Tel Aviv and what used to be the old port of Jaffa. Let's head that way.

Now here's an interesting sight. This is as it says above the door, the house of Simon the tanner, where Peter had his vision concerning Cornelius. The only problem is that

there are several of these in the neighborhood. It's kind of like back in the states where you see signs that say, "George Washington slept here."

Well, here we are at the top of what's called Jaffa's hill. And right over here is a statue called the statue of faith. At the top is the artist's portrayal of a dream of Jacob, and on each side a rather modernistic portrayal of the sacrifice of Isaac and the fall of the city of Jericho. But let me tell you something, every time I see this statue I only think of one thing, I think of Samson pushing down the pillars that caused the building to collapse on the Philistines.

Now, over here you can see a great view of Tel Aviv. What a contrast! I'm standing here in a city that's over 4,000 years old, and I'm looking at one that is less than one hundred years old. You see, folks, Tel Aviv was not founded until 1909, today is it Israel's second largest city with a population close to 400,000. Only Jerusalem is larger. The metropolitan area of Tel Aviv contains over 3 million people it is a very modern city that serves as the home of the nation's stock exchange and diamond finishing industry. Its beaches, buffets, upscale shopping and entertainment have made it a magnet for tourism. Tel Aviv is called the city that never sleeps because of its renowned night life. There's a saying over here that goes like this, "You go to Jerusalem to pray, you go to Haifa to stay, and you go to Tel Aviv to play."

Since Tel Aviv did not exist in Biblical times, it is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible, but you know what? It is a Biblically significant city because a major Bible prophecy was fulfilled here in Tel Aviv some 60 years ago. You see, it was in a building here in Tel Aviv that David Ben Gurion read the Declaration of Independence on May the 14th, 1948. And that declaration fulfilled a number of Bible prophecies about the reestablishment of Israel in the end times. One of the most significant is a symbolic one found in Isaiah chapter 66. In the New King James version, it reads as follows, "Before she was in labor she gave birth, before her pain came, she delivered a male child. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day or shall a nation be born all at once?" The New American Standard Version puts it this way, "Can a land be born in one day? Can a nation be born in a moment?" The prophecy here folks is that the nation of Israel would one day be reborn and the birth pangs would follow the birth instead of preceding it. And you know that is exactly what happened. The

state was born on May the 14th, 1948 and the next day, five Arab nations attacked. And it has been under attack since that time, for more that sixty years. Now, unlike Tel Aviv, the city we're now in, Jaffa is mentioned several times in the Bible.

In Bible times, Jaffa was a very, very important city and that's because it was Israel's major sea port. That sea port was located right down at the bottom of this hill next to that church. The city of Jaffa is mentioned four times in the Old Testament. The first time it's mentioned has to do with that fact that it was given to the tribe of Dan. The second time it's mentioned it is mentioned as a port of entry when the cedars of Lebanon were brought into the country for the building of Solomon's Temple. And let's see, the third time was when Jonah departed on his ill-fated journey from here. And the fourth time was a repeat of one of those, and that is when the cedars of Lebanon were brought into the country again for the building of the second temple. The church I showed you below is called the church of St. Peter. It commemorates two events in the life of Peter. The first is recorded in acts chapter 9, we're told that a Christian woman lived here by the name of Tabitha, her name in Greek was Dorcas. In Acts chapter 9 we are told that she was a woman abounding with deeds of kindness and charity. Well, she fell sick and died, and her fellow Christians heard that Peter was in the area in a town called Lydda. You know, that's where the Tel Aviv International Airport is located today. So, they sent for Peter, he came here, he prayed over Dorcas and she was raised from the dead. Peter then decided to stay for awhile here in Jaffa at the house of Simon the tanner, and that brings us to the second event commemorated by the church, the one concerning the Roman soldier Cornelius. Let's go down to the church for that story.

Tell you what, before we go to that area outside the church, let's go over here and have a picture made with Napoleon. Wow, he was certainly a small guy wasn't he? You know the reason there's a statue of Napoleon here is because he captured this port in March of 1799 during his Middle East campaign. And he slaughtered over three thousand people here. He might have been a little guy but he had a very big mean streak in him.

And now in this area outside the church of St. Peter let's just stop for a moment and consider the second great event that occurred here in the life of Peter. One day he was in the house of Simon the tanner when he decided to go up on the roof about noon to pray. Peter fell into a trance and beheld a great sheet coming down from heaven,

lowered by its four corners. In the sheet were all kinds of animals and birds and a voice suddenly exclaimed, "Arise Peter, and eat." Peter was troubled by the command because some of the creatures were unclean, they were not kosher according to Jewish law. So Peter protested the command, saying, "Lord I cannot eat these things because I've never eaten anything unholy or unclean!" But three times Peter saw the vision and three times he heard the command. Now, as Peter was contemplating the meaning of the vision, some men arrived at the house looking for him, they explained that they had been sent by a Roman soldier, a centurion, who lived up the coast at Caesarea Maritime. They explained that the day before Cornelius had experienced a vision in which an angel of God had spoken to him telling him to send men to Jaffa to fetch a man called Peter. When Peter heard about the vision from God, he agreed to go with them to Caesarea the next day.

Now before we proceed to Caesarea in Peter's footsteps, I want us to note what the scriptures say about this man Cornelius. In Acts 10:1 it says he was a Roman Centurion. That meant he was a Gentile soldier in charge of a cohort of men, which would have been about 480 soldiers. In verse 2 it says he was a devout man, who feared God, and who was a generous giver. In verse 22 it further states that he was a righteous man, well spoken of by all the Jews. Isn't that incredible? Think of it, an occupying soldier so good and generous and righteous that he was respected by the citizens of the occupied nation! Yet, despite all his goodness and righteousness, he still needed a Savior! God had heard his prayer, we are told in verse 4, and God was sending Peter to share the Gospel with him. Well, let's proceed to Caesarea Maritime to learn how this story ends. But before we depart Jaffa, I want to show you one more statue.

Here is a rather whimsical statue of a whale I just love it, that commemorates the story of Jonah. It's located here because, as I mentioned earlier, this is the port where Jonah departed on his ill-fated cruise. You know, each time I see this statue I think about a poem written by Carl Sandburg. It reads as follows, "If I were to pass the tomb of Jonah, I would stop and sit for a while, because I too was once swallowed up deep in the darkness, and came out alive after all." I praise God for the light He has sent into the world to deliver us from darkness, the light of His only Begotten Son, Jesus of Nazareth.

Well, it's time for us to head to Caesarea Maritime to continue the story of Cornelius. And while we are en route, here's a special blessing in song from Joel Chernoff entitled "The Year of Jubilee."

Well, we have arrived at another port city in Israel, an ancient one along the coast of the Mediterranean called Caesarea Maritime. We are about 25 miles north of Tel Aviv. Here we have a model of what this city looked like in the time of Jesus. We're standing right here next to the Roman amphitheatre which we'll see later. Over here was Herod's palace right on the sea front where he could catch all the refreshing breezes. Next to it was a large hippodrome which we'll see later where they raced horses. And over here most of the administrative offices were located right in front of a huge artificial harbor that was constructed by Herod's craftsmen. Now, it would be an understatement to say that this was a very important place. You see, this was the Roman capital of the land. The Jewish capital was in Jerusalem, this was the Roman capital. It was also the nation's main port, replacing ancient Jaffa. So at the time of Jesus, Caesarea Maritime was both the governmental and commercial center of the nation.

It was a huge city by the standards of that time. Its population exceeded 100,000, and it was spread over nearly 200 acres of land. King Herod went to great lengths to beautify the city, and he constructed an architectural wonder here. It was the largest artificial port in the world whose foundations were made of hydraulic concrete that hardened under water. Here is a picture of an artist's depiction of what the harbor probably looked like in Biblical times. The city's biggest problem was its lack of water. Herod solved that problem by having his engineers build an 8 mile long aqueduct that brought water from the nearby Carmel mountain range.

In the Middle Ages, when the Crusades occurred, the Crusaders converted the city into a fortress surrounded by a dry moat. You can see the remains of that fortress to this day. At the time of Jesus the city had a theater that would seat almost 5,000 people. It was excavated in the 1960's, and during that time, a remarkable archeological discovery was made. Well, here it is. It's called the "Pilate Stone." It is the most important extra-biblical evidence that has been found concerning Pilate. It's a marker that states that the theatre was built during the time of Pilate as governor, and Tiberius as emperor. You know it's

the kind of sign you would see inside an American post office that would say, "This post office built when so-in-so was governor and Dwight Eisenhower was president."

Right next to us here, in recent years, the archeologists have uncovered a huge hippodrome where chariot races were held. It is a scene right out of the famous movie, Ben Hur.

Let's pause for a moment here at the Roman Theater to consider the biblically significant things that occurred here in Caesarea during New Testament times. For example, Phillip the Evangelist came here to preach early in his ministry and he made this his base of operations. Herod Agrippa died here, probably in this theater, when he was eaten by worms. Paul ended his second and third missionary journeys here. And after his third missionary journey, he was confronted here by a prophet named Agabus who warned him not to go to Jerusalem. After his was arrested in Jerusalem, Paul was brought back here to Caesarea Maritime where he remained in prison for two years before he was sent on to Rome.

But the most important event that occurred here, in my opinion, was Peter's meeting with Cornelius. Let's pick up that story where we left off in Jaffa. As I explained in Jaffa, Cornelius was a righteous Roman soldier who lived right here in Caesarea Maritime. As he was praying one day, an angel appeared to him and told him to send men to Jaffa to find the Apostle Peter. The next day, as Cornelius' men approached Jaffa, Peter was prepared for their visit by being given a vision in which he was told to eat unclean animals. As Peter was reflecting on the meaning of the vision, Cornelius' men arrived and Peter agreed to accompany them to this city.

After a two day journey up the coast, Peter arrived here and proceeded to the house of Cornelius. As he entered the house, Peter seemed to suddenly understand the meaning of the vision that God had given him. Here's what it says in Acts chapter 10, beginning with verse 28, "Then Peter said to them, 'You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.'" He proceeded and said, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality but in every nation whoever fears him and works righteousness is accepted by him."

Peter then proceeded to present the first Gospel sermon to a group of Gentiles. In the sermon, Peter emphasized the resurrection of Jesus. Listen to how he did it, “You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how 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 the things He did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. And they also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. But God raised Him up on the third day, and granted that He should become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us, who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.” Then, as Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon the assembly and people began to speak in tongues and praise God. Peter realized it was the very same thing that had happened on the Day of Pentecost, and he took it as a sign of God’s approval for the Gospel to be preached to the Gentiles. This, to say the least, was a revolutionary event. The grace of God was being extended to the Gentiles, a pagan people despised by the Jews. And now, here is Jack Hollingsworth singing of that amazing Grace.

Closing

Dr. Reagan: Welcome to our studio in Dallas, Texas. The story of Cornelius that we have just related to you from Israel leaves us with a basic question. How does it apply to you and me today? Well, the answer is really very simple. We live in a world where every religion except Christianity teaches salvation by good works. Satan wants everyone to believe that they can get to Heaven by just being good. And you know what, he has been very successful at convincing most people throughout history that they can earn their way to Heaven. But folks, there is only one way to eternal life with God and that is through faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Salvation is a gift of God by grace through faith. There is nothing that you can do to earn it. You cannot be saved by being born into a Christian family. You can’t be saved by joining a church. Religious rites like baptism will not save you. And all the good works in the world will not cleanse you of your sins.

Cornelius was a good, just, generous and righteous man, but he needed a Savior.

Before he met Cornelius, Peter had preached a sermon to the very Sanhedrin Council that had condemned Jesus to death. In that sermon Peter declared: “There is not salvation in anyone else. For there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.”

Have you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior? I hope so, because the signs of the times indicate He is returning very soon. Folks, we are living on borrowed time! Are you a professing Christian, but one who is trusting in you own good works? If so, you need to transfer that trust to Jesus and to Him alone. Whether you are not a Christian or you claim to be one but have never really put your trust in Jesus, I invite you to pray this prayer with me: Heavenly Father, I confess that I am a sinner and that I need a Savior. By faith I receive your free gift of salvation by accepting Your Son, Jesus of Nazareth, as my Lord and Savior. Thank you Father for your grace and mercy, amen.

If you prayed that prayer with me, I urge you to find a Bible believing and Jesus exalting church where you can profess your faith publicly and manifest your faith through baptism.

Well, folks, that’s our program for this week. I hope it has been a blessing to you, and I hope you will be back with us next week when we will take a look at another profile in righteousness, the prophet Elijah. Until then, this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb and Lion Ministries, saying, “Look up, be ready, for your redemption is drawing near!”

End of Program