



Amazing Conversions - Part 7

Cornelius: Drawn to Seek God

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It may seem like a long time ago, but we were studying through the book of Acts. And we're actually in the middle of a series that I entitled Amazing Conversions. We were trying to understand the way that God gets a hold of people's lives and directs them to genuine repentance and faith, which I trust that many of you have experienced yourself. And after somewhat of a long break, it feels like we are back into studying this passage. But before we get to it, this passage in particular necessitates us thinking some larger thoughts, some bigger theological thoughts. And I hope when you come to Compass Bible Church you are ready to think those kinds of thoughts.

So we need to think about it in this particular text as we study the first of four parts of the story of Cornelius, a Roman soldier, a Roman centurion, a leader. As we look at his life, it's a bit of a real test of our theology to think about how he came to be and to understand the descriptions that are given about him in God's word, it is unique. So think with me this morning as we work through these topics and let us begin with an understanding of God's work in areas you probably don't think much about. God is actively involved in all things. Christ himself is said to be, in John 1, "The creator of all things and in him was life and he was the light of men, he gave existence to all things, nothing was created in this world that has been created if he didn't create it," and then he sustains it. Colossians 1:17. He upholds all things, in him all things hold together, that's the way Paul like to put it. As the writer of Hebrews puts it, "He upholds all things," the Son, "by the word of his power."

Back in the Old Testament in Isaiah 6, it talks about God who has the earth that is "full of his glory." And we don't think much about that, but nothing in this world that you enjoy is going to take place if God is not actively involved in sustaining the creation that he made. We're not deists who believe that God created and walked away. We understand that God has revealed himself to be actively involved. To use another quotation from Scripture in Acts 17 that "In him we live and move and have our being." God is actively involved. You can't live without him being here, without him being thoughtfully involved. If God, as I often say, were to turn away from his creation, stop giving attention to it, it would implode. You wouldn't be here. You can't have anything happen in the last 168 hours of your life this last week without God being actively involved in it.

You had a heart that has been beating, right? I mean, hundreds of thousands of times in this last week that if it weren't pumping and contracting and putting this blood through your body, you would not have enjoyed any... If I said did you have a good week, you wouldn't have had a week here on earth without that. Yet you didn't think about it. You have lungs that are reinflating, right? 150,000 times in a week. And if that's not happening, even as you're unconscious in your sleep, you wouldn't wake up in the morning. You have eyelids that are constantly opening and closing to keep your eyes functioning. 125,000 times in your waking hours, your eyelids are opening and closing. Your eyes couldn't function without that. You live on this giant sphere, this rock that we call earth that is spinning. The physics of the world



should be, at least if you're on a spinning object, that you get thrown off of it at the speed that we're at, which is over a thousand miles an hour at the equator of the planet. At this particular latitude to be exact here in Aliso Viejo, we are currently moving right now on the surface of this earth, at this sea level, at 867 miles per hour. You're moving quickly and you're spinning around this planet. You should be thrown into the cold vacuum of space.

But instead, because of this thing that God put together called the gravitational constant, because you have under your feet a six septillion ton mass, it keeps you nicely anchored on this planet. I'm not fully, right? You can you can jump, not very high, but you're tied here to it because of the laws that God has not only made, but the laws that he sustains. The glory of God fills the earth. You could not have enjoyed anything without God's active involvement. And we could preach on that endlessly. Of all the things that have to happen to have your life and my life experience anything that we would say that's a good experience. And that's not only true in the physical world, it's also true, now catch this, in the moral world. Virtue, goodness, righteousness, peace. All of the things that we look at that we would say these are good moral things, these are virtuous things, none of those are happening, catch this, and this is more novel than you might think because we don't think about it, if God does not give us that, actively give us that. And when I say us, I'm speaking us in terms of humanity. Right? Whenever a good decision is made in a business or in a neighborhood or as someone drives down the road and sees someone in need, all of those decisions, if they're good, if we would put them in a category that we would say that's good versus bad, we would say that is an active involvement of God.

Turn with me before we even get to Acts 10 to Deuteronomy Chapter 8. In Deuteronomy Chapter 8, God is bringing the people of Israel into the Promised Land. The Promised Land is going to be filled with warfare as the Israelis drive them out, which, of course, is why all your non-Christian friends say, "Well, I don't like the Bible. It is filled with genocide." Yes, it's filled with genocide. You're absolutely right. God is going to wipe out the Canaanites. It's exactly what God is going to do with no apologies, because they are wicked and they are evil and the entire society, he's going to be done with it. Right? I mean, we don't seem to be bothered when those non-Christians, you know, I don't know if non-Christians do, but they go out and buy that, you know, that wallpaper border in their kid's nursery of animals on a floating ark. And for some reason, we forget that that's the ultimate genocide of Genesis Chapter 6 through 9. He kills the whole planet.

And we recognize that the most consequential sentence in all of human history, when God said in Genesis 2, "The day you eat of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, in that day, you will surely die," that instantly we were cast into this position before our creator as being wholly unacceptable, wholly unacceptable. That God says you are now separated from me. That's what death is. "You are dead to me. As a matter of fact, when I show up next time, instead of their coming and interacting with me in fellowship, and peace and harmony, you're going to run for the shadows and you're going to hide from me in shame because you disobeyed me. You became someone who thinks that you can somehow assert your own autonomy and that God is no longer God and that you're going to be God."



And at that particular point, the whole creation was messed up and human beings were no longer virtuous. They were no longer innocent. They were no longer righteous. They were no longer in fellowship or in favor with God. And everything was a mess. And yet the Israelites were not quite as bad as the Canaanites, who were taking their babies and throwing them in the fire and sacrificing living children to the false idol Moloch. The Israelites weren't doing that. They were better than that. They weren't great, but they were better than that. They weren't involved in the kind of homosexuality and talk about gender confusion, read through the Pentateuch how perverse that Canaanite world was, the kind of young male prostitution that was going on in Canaan. And God was done with it, just like he was in the days of Noah, he was done with it. And so he was going to use a people that he had taken through the wilderness and who had learned something about the fear of God and doing right things. They weren't great, but they were certainly better than the Canaanites and he was going to bring them into the land.

And he told them many times, you're going to have stuff that you didn't work for. I'm giving it to you, Wells you didn't dig, vineyards you didn't plant, animals you didn't tend. And they're going to be yours now because I'm driving this nation out. And when you sit back and settle the land and you put your rocking chair on your porch and put your feet up and look out at all that you have, look with me now at Deuteronomy Chapter 8, he says this: When it comes to what you think in your own heart, do not get this wrong, verse 17. "Beware," that means you tend to think this and you shouldn't think it, "Beware, lest you say in your heart," that's your presuppositional understandings, your foundational thoughts about the way things are. "Do not think in your own heart it's my power and the might of my hand that have gotten me this wealth," any more than you're holding yourself to the planet right now. You're not. You can't do it. You're not keeping your blood oxygenated. You're not digesting your food. You can't do it. You're not capable, you don't have the power to do it. You can't snap the synapse in your mind to recall anything you learned in college to apply to your jobs this week. You cannot do it. God has to do that. He has to give you that power. "You shall remember the Lord your God," you're not autonomous like all your non-Christian friends think that they're kind of doing it on their own, right? They're not doing it on their own. They can do it on their own. They are dependent on the God, the triune God, the Son that gave them life. He is the light of men. He gives them life. He sustains their life. You can't think that you've done it. You have no inherent ability to do anything. No, it is "the Lord, your God, it is he who gives you power to get wealth."

The whole reason you got any of this, the whole reason you can do any farming, the only reason you can build a rocking chair in, you know, the ancient Near East is because I'm giving you power to do that. I am granting you that because you're dead, really, when it comes to your creator. You've chosen to be a part of this entire system of what Adam had come up with. You didn't choose to be born. I get that. But you've been a part of this whole thing where you are in rebellion against God and therefore you're completely in the category under the banner of lost and corrupt. But God is giving you power anyway. That's called grace. It's like Jesus said, "when the rains fall on the crops of the evil and the good," when the sun rises and photosynthesis takes place out in the fields and the wheat and the barley grows, all of that, it's



all a gift. It's the grace of God. We call it common grace, but it's God's active involvement in giving... "I thought this was about morality?"

Chapter 9. Deuteronomy Chapter 9. He goes on to talk about verse 4. Another problem of what you might be tempted to say in your heart. "Do not say in your heart," Deuteronomy 9:4, "that after the Lord God has thrust them out," these evil people, "before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess the land.'" Now, remember, they were more righteous. They were not aborting their babies like our society. Right? They were not killing their children and sacrificing them to Moloch. They were not engaged in young male prostitution in their cult idol process. They weren't cross-dressing like they were told not to do in the law. They weren't doing all the things the Canaanites were doing. They weren't confused about their gender. Right? They were doing the things that God had said, at least imperfectly, they were better than the Canaanites. But don't think that you have some inherent righteousness where God says, "Well, I got the terrible Canaanites out there, but, oh, I got some good people over here." You are better, objectively better. But all of that is a gift.

I'm just looking at the fact that I've had it with these people, "whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out before you," not because of your righteousness, because guess what? We have no righteousness. Oh, you're acting righteously. Well, where did you get it? Right? I have no ability or authority over the laws of physics. I have no ability. But I'm a participant and a beneficiary of the laws of physics today. The laws of biology. Right? God is doing all of that, God is sustaining all of that. And he's also giving a level of righteousness, comparative righteousness that's better than the Canaanites, to the people of Israel. It's not the uprightness of your heart. You have no inherent uprightness of your heart. None. No, all of that is a gift. God is providing that for you. Right?

"It's not because of your uprightness of a heart that you're going in to possess the land, but because of the wickedness of these nations." These folks have gotten so far down the path and this is why "the Lord, your God is driving them out before you." As a matter of fact, "it's because he's confirming the word," that's a promise, now, "the word that the Lord swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." And if you think, well, it's because they were perfect, they were godly, they were holy. Well, you've read the book of Genesis. They were not righteous and holy and godly. Well, they were more than most people. That's true. Abraham was better than a lot. But just like every hero of the Bible, God wants to make clear, none of these people are holy.

Well, how do they become more righteous than other people, right? Well, how did that get...? Why is Abraham a better man than Pharaoh? Then he meets this weird guy, Melchizedek. How is Melchizedek really a better man than his father-in-law, Jethro, some priest in Midian? And how is he better than some terrible ancient Near Eastern Mesopotamian priestess who's making people give their children in sacrifice? How are any of these people better than the others? Well, it's the same reason in this room we have people who are smarter than other people. We have people who are more attractive than other people. We have people with more money in the bank than other people. We got people driving nicer cars than other people.



All this comparative gift goes out, and as the Bible reminds us, why, if everything you've received, "Why do you boast as though you haven't received it," and then you think like the world, "Well, because I earned it." You didn't earn it because you can't earn it. You don't have the ability to keep digesting your food or keeping your eyeballs moist. That's a God thing. God gives you that power. And if you're righteous in making decisions and you haven't been cheating on your wife or cheating on your taxes or killing anyone or raping anyone this week, all of that restraint, the Bible says in Second Thessalonians, is the Spirit of God in the world restraining you from evil. But if you had your own way, then you would live out the reality of Romans 3.

Matter of fact, let's look at that passage, Romans Chapter 3. I know we teach our kids "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." But I need you to think about what that means. Because your kids learn that verse and you say, "Well, yeah, you're not as good as you could be because God's perfect and you're not perfect. You know, no one's perfect." That's not what that verse means. Take a look, unpack that verse with me here in Romans Chapter 3. Here's what Romans Chapter 3 teaches us about the God who is perfect and human beings who are sinful. "Well, the Jews really are inherently better than the Gentiles, right? Just like the Israelites in Exodus and Deuteronomy are better than the Canaanites back then." No, no, no. "What then? Are we Jews any better off?" And the answer biblically is, "No, not at all." Not at all, for we've already charged in the book and we're only halfway through Chapter 3, he says that all, both Jews and Greeks and Israelites and Canaanites, and taxpaying, upstanding citizens of South Orange County and the dregs of the world who are on the news feeds of your phone this morning. Are they any better off? I mean, really? No. We're all charged under this banner. Here's the heading. You're all under sin. You're all sinners. Right? As it is written, "there is none righteous."

And we can add this thought because this is the whole point, none who are inherently righteous. None of you have any righteousness inherent in you. "Not one. No one understands; no one seeks God," no one the Bible says. "All have turned aside; and together have become worthless." The corruption of humanity was set in stone when it came to what was going to come after Genesis Chapter 3. Every human being was born under sin, under the banner of sin, separated from God. There are wholly dead unto God. They're dead in their transgressions and sins. If there's anything that defies that, if there's anything that contradicts that, it must be God. God must be doing that. "All have turned aside; together they become worthless, no one does good, not even one."

That starts to affirm some of the things we read in Scripture like when in Mark 10, a man comes to Jesus and calls him good rabbi, "good teacher," and Jesus says stop, "Why do you call me good? For there is no one good but God alone." And you say, "Well, I've been paying attention taking notes in your sermons, Pastor Mike. I know what that means. And what that means is comparatively, I mean, the absolute nature of God's goodness and everything else is less than." And there's truth to that. But here's what I am saying, there are plenty of affirmations in the Scripture of people who are doing good things and they're rightly called good. Abraham was called good. Noah was called good. Daniel was called good. Job was



called good. Plenty of people in the New Testament were called good. And this passage says, "No, no one's good." Plenty of people are described as seeking God. Well, this passage says, "No one seeks God."

And here's the thing, I've added this concept for you, just like you wouldn't be alive without God's active involvement. There's no one good. There would be no good king, no good leader, no good administrator, no good boss, no good employee, no good neighbor EVER were it not for God's active involvement. Because inherently you do not have the ability to do any of that. And the Bible's very clear about the fact that all of it is a gift. We talk about the grace of God, the glory. "The earth is full of his glory." Where did it come from? It's all derived. Your smarts are derived, your beauty is derived, your righteousness is derived, your virtue is derived. Now it's derived in different levels, just like your attractiveness or your intelligence. It's all on a variable scale. And so is your virtue. And so is your goodness. And so is the restraint of your bad lusts and desires. All of that is a gift from God.

Now, are you actively involved in doing things like learning your times tables when you're a kid or fighting temptation as a person? Yes, and that's true throughout. I get that. There's this full-blown engagement of our volition. And this is a bit of the struggle that we have with God's sovereignty and his gifts and his animation of his creation and our participation in doing it. We work out not only our salvation because God's at work in us, "both to will and to work for his good pleasure," Philippians 2. But it's true in every reality. There's nobody who builds a barn or plows a field or plants a tree or does all the hard work by the sweat of his brow to get the weeds out of the field that God is not enabling, that God is not giving that to them. I mean, we really need to stop and think about the common grace of God. And the common grace of God is an active grace. We need to recognize this, that he needs to be credited with all of that. And it will help us understand when in the Bible we have people described as good.

But even the passages that I've already quoted or at least alluded to, when I think about Abraham or Noah, or I think about Daniel or Job, these people, "Well, those are guys like in my camp and I'm trusting in God. I'm not like the non-Christians." And then I have to ask you, are you telling me there are no non-Christians who are good? "Absolutely. I know that, that's a question on a test, Pastor Mike, I'm going to pass it." No. No one's good. And even if I'm going to say there are people who are good, I'm going to say that's because of the imputed righteousness of Christ and it is God's active involvement post-conversion.

And I'm going to say turn to Acts Chapter 10 and we've got to figure out a category for Cornelius. And Cornelius is someone that I think should challenge our view of common grace, general calling, effectual calling. If you're a theologian here this morning, I want you to think this through, the way that God is engaged in bringing people to himself. And this is an active engagement of God's mercy and grace to sinners who have no capacity inherently to do any of this. This is going to help us. I know you're thinking, "How is this going to help us?" It's going to help us. Here's how it's going to help us. It's going to help you not think wrongly about reality. "Well, that's a big philosophical..." It's going to help you not think wrongly about your testimony. It's going to help you not think wrongly about your neighbor. It's going to help you not think wrongly about someone who you need to share the gospel with this week.



There's a lot that we need to do even in sorting out our own testimonies, because all of us have a story. If you sit here today saying I'm a Christian, I'm a follower of Christ, I have repented of my sins, I've put my trust in Christ, I want to say that experience, and I preached this sermon, I think I referenced it on the back, the experience of salvation that we go through involves a period before repentance and faith. We call that in Scripture, John 6:44, John 6:44, it's the action of God drawing us to himself. This is an alien interest in God, you don't have it. Why? Because you're dead in transgressions and sins. There's a lot of things that might have been a part of the process that describe your testimony of you and many of you here coming through this process of having an increasing interest in Christ and an increasing interest in the Bible, more and more thoughts about God and how he's good and authoritative, and I should really be right with him. And you get to the place in the gospel where it all clicks and you repent and put your trust in Christ.

All of that pre-conversion grace, all that pre-conversion preparation, I just want you to think about that, OK? That is an active engagement of God and his Spirit in your life. And some of you think, "Well, if I ever prayed before I was a Christian, I must have been saved by then. If I ever had any interest in worship or any interest in God, because non-Christians are dead in their transgressions, they're dead to God, they have a heart of stone." Now, I understand there are testimonies that are dramatic. Let's think just about the ones we've been through in Acts before we read Acts 10. Right? We think about, for instance, Saul of Tarsus in Chapter 9. OK? Let's just think about his view of Christ. He was so hostile toward Christ that he was described by Christ when he shows up on the road to Damascus as fighting him, persecuting him. Hard for you, as he explains later, to kick against the goads. You and I are at odds with one another and I got to slam you off your horse and bring you to Ananias' house and make you blind for three days to get you to recognize that you're fighting me.

Well, the chapter before that here we had Paul fighting Christology, proper biblical Christology, real Christology that Jesus was the Christ. Well, the chapter before that, we had this Ethiopian coming back from Jerusalem on a chariot and man, he's hungry for the right Christology. I mean, he's warming up to it. He's thinking about it. He's been to Jerusalem for some festival or something and he's reading the scroll of Isaiah and he asks Philip, "What about Isaiah 53 here? Is the prophet talking about himself or someone else?" Is this a messianic passage? And starting from there, Philip explains it. So he's got an interest and an appetite to get his Christology right. Paul had no interest in getting his Christology right. God knocks him off of his horse. That's a really different testimony. You'd say the Ethiopian eunuch was a seeker. He was seeking a proper view of Christ. Paul? "Man, I've already decided who Christ is. He's trash and everybody who follows him needs to be persecuted."

We're going to meet Cornelius now. Cornelius is a man who is much different than the thief on the cross. The thief on the cross spent his whole life trashing anything that you might say is moral or virtuous or good. Right? There's no honor among thieves. He probably was a terrible friend to have. Even among his thug band, his insurrectionist band. He was a sinner, a real bad sinner. And that bad sinner came to faith in Christ just before he died. He put his trust in Christ and he was justified, just like Saul of Tarsus was justified, just like the Ethiopian

eunuch in Chapter 8 was justified. We're about to see, I'm going to take four weeks to go through it, we're about to see Cornelius get justified but his story is a little different than the thief on the cross. I want us to understand it because these are big words that the Bible gives, very commending words, right? These are good words. This is applause for this guy. And he is a non-Christian. He is not justified. "There is no other name under heaven, given among men by which we must be saved." And he does not trust that. His Christology is wrong too.

Matter of fact, the whole reason God is sending Peter ultimately to Cornelius is to get him saved. What does that mean? He's not saved now. He needs to be wrapped in the righteousness of Christ, he needs to be ready to hear from the Father on the day of his death, "Welcome into the kingdom. You're 100% accepted. You are fully qualified to share in the inheritance." He needs Christ. But he's been drawn. He's been drawn for months, he's been drawn for years, and there are a lot of good things happening in his life. I'm not going to play games with you, those are good things. Just like when a leader makes a good decision, even if we haven't had many of these decisions going on today. But let's just say we had some politicians making good decisions. Right? We would say, according to Romans Chapter 13, that's them doing a good thing. They're rewarding good and punishing bad and when they do that, that is a good thing. It's a good thing and we're not going to play biblical theological games to dismiss the goodness of it, even though it's not goodness that will ever save you or qualify you for heaven. Are you following this this morning?

OK, let's read the passage. Acts Chapter 10 starting in verse 1, "At Caesarea," that's a coastal city here. This is the one that's just to the west of Jerusalem, west-northwest, and it's a coastal town and it was a big Roman port. "There was a man named Cornelius." He will be a focus primarily of our overarching narrative here for the next four weeks. "He was a centurion." You have one cent, that's one one-hundredth, right? Or century, that's 100 years. "Cent" means you're over a hundred soldiers. A centurion is in charge of roughly 100 soldiers, "of what was known as the Italian Cohort," battalion. So he's from Rome. He's a Roman soldier. A cohort usually has 600 men. So he's one of like five or six lieutenants of this big military regiment.

Now, here's how he's described. This word is not used very often in the New Testament, but it's translated here "devout." If you do a little word study on that, devout, you'll see it translated "godly" and "pious." This man is described as a godly, pious man. Well, maybe he's really committed to the Roman pantheon of gods back there in Rome and he's devoted to his idols. No, no, no. "He feared God," right? No qualification, we're talking about the God that Luke has been writing about. Well, I mean, the one that we know of in the Bible. No, he feared that God. And not only was he leading the military people under him to do what he said militarily, he was leading his family as it relates to theology, at least to fear that same God that he feared. He feared God and he made sure that his kids weren't, I don't know, using the Lord's name in vain or whatever it is that he knew about God. He wanted to make sure his kids and his servants in his household, his wife, he was leading them to do... There's some cost involved in that. And speaking of cost, he was willing to put his checkbook on the line.



He gave alms generously to the people. Alms. When there's a need, that's a fancy old biblical word for the idea of giving to someone who has a need. And he didn't just give a little bit, little two cents here, two cents there. He was generously giving to the people. And he prayed continually to the idols. No, to God, he prayed. I don't know how his prayer life was, but here's a non-Christian right here, a Roman soldier praying all the time. Right? Whatever that means. That means he was known for praying. Praying to who? The real God. Here is a man who has grace. It's much like Melchizedek in the Old Testament. We meet someone who's doing stuff that is a reflection of God's goodness that you would rightly put under the heading of godly, pious, devout.

Where'd that come from? Well, just like everything. Everything good, it comes from God. Nothing that we have that's good is happening by our inherent worth or our goodness or our virtue. All of that virtue is derived, just like your authority is derived, just like your intelligence is derived, just like everything in your life is derived. It's derived from the one source, the God of the universe. You don't think that way, perhaps, because you think too much like the world. But let's think more like we should think and that is that we are all under the subjection of God who is the giver and sustainer of all things. And the Bible says this man was a godly man. That means God was seemingly really generous to him in giving him an interest in fearing him. And if you think rightly about him, you'll fear him. And giving and praying. I mean, prayer, even just that is an aspect of us trusting in God and requesting of God and worshiping God. He was doing all of that.

"About the ninth hour of the day," verse 3, 3:00 p.m. by the way, your Bible should say that in the margins somewhere. It started at six o'clock with their counting of their hourly sequence of the day, "he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, 'Cornelius.'" So in the afternoon he, which is the traditional time for prayer for the Jewish people, at least. And so maybe mid-afternoon coffee break he's praying in Caesarea and he hears this angel come and say Cornelius. "And he stared at him in terror." So whatever view of God he had, it was pretty high and lofty and he feared him because he should. It's like Mr. Beaver talking to Susan about Aslan, the King, and he's fearful and, you know, he's not domesticated. And you ought to have a high view of God like Isaiah 6 and so he fears God.

Well, God could have sent like anyone. He could have sent a little Girl Scout cookies salesperson to represent him. God could send angels in any form he wants. They can be so nondescript according to Hebrews 13, you wouldn't even know you were encountering one. But he sends a reflection of heavenly authority that scared the big man with all the stripes on his shoulders and all the army standing outside at his beck and call, he was terrified. So God says, "Yeah, you fear me. That's the right thing. Matter of fact, let's up that. Let's just put a little octane in that. We're going to move that up and you need to see who I am." And at that, the angel reflecting the authority of heaven puts him in a terror, he stares at him and he says, "What is it 'Kyrios.'" What is it, Lord? What is it one-in-charge? Did he think he was talking to God? I don't think so. But either way, it's a word of lofty respect. It's an appellation, a title, of great respect.



"What is it, Lord?" What is it sir? Some translations translate it. "And he said to him," check this out, "your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God." I don't think I could think of a passage that would describe better what I, as a Christian, an adopted child of God, would want my prayers to be. I'd like it to be that. I'd like it to be continual more than it is. We need to pray more. And I'd like it to ascend as a memorial that God is remembering and thinking about all the time. And it's like that picture in the book of Revelation or the Old Testament picture of the smoke of the sacrifice coming up and pleasing God. I want my prayers, as it says in the book of Revelation, to be incense in the temple. I would like it to go up as the "prayers of the saints." I'd like him to remember me. I'd like that. That would be great.

We're talking about a non-Christian here. This is a non-Christian we're talking about. Someone not clothed in the righteousness. Not acceptable. If he were to die here, he does not have acceptability before God because he doesn't have the right Christology. Who knows what he thinks of Christ? Maybe some of his soldiers were there having Christ crucified not long ago. I mean, just in a matter of a year or so. I mean, I don't know what he thinks of Christ, but he needs to think rightly about Christ. That's why he doesn't say in verse 5, "Now I'm here just to tell you, because your alms and your prayers, your giving, all that God's always remembering that, hey, it's all copasetic. Can't wait to see you up here in heaven. See you soon. Just keep on being good. You don't need the gospel because you're a good person."

No, you need more information. And there's a guy, a fisherman from Galilee. I know he's not very impressive, but he's the senior pastor of the church in Jerusalem and he's going to come and he's got a message for you. So I need you to go and have your guys go get him. "Now send men to Joppa," about 30 miles away, "and bring one Simon, who is called Peter. He's lodging," he's staying, "with one Simon," sadly, they had the same name, a bit confusing. But he's not Simon the Apostle. He's Simon the Tanner. Right? He's making leather goods, "whose house is by the sea," which is part of the process of creating these leather goods. You need the ocean for that, the sea for that, the Mediterranean Sea. "When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him," a lot of people at his beck and call, "having related everything to them."

Guess what? He obeyed. Just like he knew he should obey God when it comes to prayer. He should obey God when it comes to giving generously to people in need and even just fearing God. You should obey God and fearing God. God is a consuming fire. You ought to be in respect of that God, the highest possible respect. He's doing all that. And now God says you got more to do. You need to have a coffee with Peter and you need to hear what he has to say. And he goes, "Yes, sir." And the man with great authority recognizes he's under authority, under authority of heaven and God is now sent a messenger to go get another messenger and that messenger is going to come and share the message. so that "the name," the only name, "under heaven given among men by which he can be saved," he's going to get him saved.



I guess just to step out of this for a second, you do know that there are people in your life who you probably haven't even thought of sharing the gospel with because you think they're pretty good people. You may think unbiblically about the fact because they're good people, "I'm sure they'll be fine on Judgment Day." And you know, that's not right. Right? I mean, we often think about the people who we think "they really need God, they need Jesus, I wish they were a Christian." But then you got people around you who are good neighbors, good coworkers. I mean, really good people. And you've said that before, right? They're really a good person. If you think like the world, you think, "Well, those good people, I'm sure they'll do fine on Judgment Day. God is going to cut them some slack."

Now, I know this is about Gentile's salvation, and we got a big pivot point here in Chapter 10 of Acts in the gospel going from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and now the ends of the earth. We're going to hit Rome here via this guy, Cornelius. But it's way more than that. It's a great lesson for us as we get started in the fact that God is endowing people with an interest in himself. Not only an interest in himself, but a deference and submission to what God wants and they're doing what God wants, even though they're not saved. And I know your theology, if you're too simplistic and not nuanced enough, you think that's impossible. All of our righteousness is as filthy rags. If we're sinners, we're dead in our transgressions and sins. You do know, you've been here long enough to know, I 100% believe that. But I don't believe it to the extent that I'm going to say somehow if I see you interested in God, it must not be a real interest. Or if you did good, I can't really call it good. Not good good. Well, it's not good compared to the ultimate infinite good of God. But I'll tell you what, it's good and it's better than bad because bad is bad and I know bad when I see it. And the reality is that sometimes we don't give this the right perspective.

Two things. Let's say them pretty close together. Number one. What we need to do is "See Grace in any Pursuit of God." See grace. What I mean by that is God is gifting people that interest. And guess what? The Ethiopian eunuch who Philip encountered, he had an interest. And you know what? Now we have a guy with an interest in good theology. He needs some good Christology to know who Christ is. And he's got an interest. Where did that interest come from? It came from God. Go back in your testimony. Did you have any interest in Christ before you came to faith in Christ? Matter of fact, were there some people in your life like Philip or Peter who helped you get clear about what it was you needed to understand, what it was you needed to do? You needed to obey the gospel, which is to trust in him. Matter of fact, they might have looked at your interest in Christ and said your interest in Christ is really mixed with some motives that are wrong. We need to clarify those motives.

Remember when Jesus fed the 5,000? He had people come to him and here's the word, I just love it. They were "seeking" Jesus. They were seeking Jesus. And he said, here's the problem. "You're seeking me just because you saw the sign and you want to see your bellies filled. It wasn't that you're willing to read the sign and trust me." He said the problem is you're coming with the wrong motive. What you need to do is you need to know what it is to do the work of God and I need to tell you that. But unfortunately, "you're working for food that perishes. Instead work for the food that endures to eternal life." So let me clarify. You've come to the right person. You've come with the wrong kind of motivation. At least part of it is wrong.



You need to correct that. You need to understand what the work of God is. And then they said, "What is the work of God that we can do the work of God?" It's to believe on the one he sent. You need to trust in me.

And here's the thing. I'll bet you had people like Jesus or like Phillip or like Peter who came in and said, "OK, you're making moves to God and that's a good thing. And what you need is clarification, what you need is to know exactly what it is that you're thinking. You're thinking about God and you're thinking more accurately about God. You're having interest in church. You have an interest in the Bible. You've been praying more often. You've been coming to church and checking things out." All of that, I'm going to say is good and I mean good. It's good. It's good. And all that good is derived. It comes from God, from heaven. Heaven is doing that. It's what John 6:44 says, "God is drawing you." He's drawing you and all that's good. I'm going to call that great because it's going to get you to the place of repentance and faith where you will immediately be justified, clothed in the righteousness of Christ. That happens in a moment. But there is a lot of pre-Christian interest, pre-Christian drawing, pre-Christian grace.

And I just want us to recognize that. Because we look at a guy like this and you've got to explain it. I'm going to explain it the way the Bible, I think, explains it, like in and of yourself inherently, you would never seek God, you'd never be interested in God. Oh, here's a man interested in God. Here's a man seeking God. What's that all about? It's about God. It's about God putting in his heart a desire to know more about God. That's how God works. And some of you look back at your testimony, like I said earlier, and you say, "Any move toward God, if I thought it was genuine or mostly genuine or kind of genuine, that wouldn't happen unless I was a Christian." And I'm saying no, no, no. You got that all wrong. The book of Hebrews is filled with people who have all kinds of encounters with all kinds of God things, and they're not real Christians. I mean, that you need to say is not really...

I do not define my Christian life about whether or not God was at work in my life, because every pre-Christian experience God is at work in my life. Every non-Christian, every man incarcerated in prison today, who are the worst criminals of our country. Right? God is at work in their life just keeping their hearts beating, keeping their blood oxygenated, digesting their food. But beyond that, if there's any good going on and there might be some good going on, even in the worst criminals among us, that good is God in his common grace. Then in the effectual call of God as he draws them to himself there's good along the way that we're going to say that's a good good, a great good and it's a God good. And we need to give credit to God for doing that.

All of it is of grace. All of it is a gift. All of it is God's gracious involvement. That's why God can give commands to sinners like this, Isaiah 55. Jot this down, Isaiah 55 verses 6 through 11. He says this, and again, I'll define it from verse 7, he calls the people who he's talking to "the wicked." OK? Here's what he says to the wicked, verse 6, "Seek the Lord," seek the Lord, seek the Lord, "while he may be found; call upon him while he's near." Now, if Cornelius is a non-Christian, what category is he in? The lost. You can call him the wicked, the condemned, children of Satan. All of that is true, right? First John 5, I'm quoting that "children of the devil."



That's true. But he's seeking. Where did that come from? That's God pulling him. As Isaiah speaks to the wicked, he's saying "seek the Lord" and those who start seeking the Lord say, "Yeah, I want to know God. I'd like to know more about him. Matter of fact, I've been praying more often. I've been interested in what the Bible says. Do you know what Moses wrote? I'd like to understand better."

All of that seeking is a God thing. He commands the wicked, "Seek the Lord and he may be found; call upon him while he's near." And I know some of you from your ivory tower, your theological perch, you're looking at churches, for instance, that say we have a seeker service. And I'm not into that terminology. I get that. You say, "Well, that's not biblical." You understand the biblical definition of someone coming to Christ is a period of time that the Bible would describe as seeking him. And I'll quote another passage. I mean, we got it in Romans 10. Here's one from Acts 17. When Paul is speaking to the Athenians, he says God has put people in their geographic boundaries on the timetable when they were born, where they would live, all of those boundaries of their habitations so that they, here's the next verse in that passage, it's a purpose clause very strong in the grammar, "so that they might seek God and perhaps find him."

Seeking is what we want to see with non-Christians. We like them to seek out. We'd like them to submit to the good of God. We'd like them to restrain evil in their life. We would like them to be generous. We'd like them to pray. Now, I know some of you want to discount all this because you've read theologians who say, "Well, that's Satan's tactic to have a good moral society. And you know what? I'd rather do ministry in a wicked place because, you know, that's where people know that they're wrong with God. I don't want people who are morally upstanding because, you know, those people, they're blinded to their need." Now, is there truth in that? I get it. I get it. I get it. I get it. John 9, the Pharisees thought they were seeing and because they thought they were seeing, they remained blind. Or to quote Luke 18, Jesus tells a parable of the Pharisee who goes to the Temple Mount to pray. He looks at the tax collector and he goes, "Oh, I'm glad I'm not like you." And therefore, he was blinded to his need.

He wasn't crying out for mercy for his sin. Why? Because we're all under sin. We're no better off. We all need conversion. We all need justification. But you know what I want? I want less people who are lowly in their morality and their corruption and their cheating and stealing. I don't think you want to be living next door to the thief on the cross. You'd rather live next door to Cornelius, am I right? And I think that's good. It's not only good for you to have a neighbor who is a good, generous person who's ready to help. Right? Who prays for things. Right? It's a good thing because that is part of God at work in their lives, we trust, as you get involved in their life, to be a guide to bring them to the next step. And the next step is you've been obedient, you've feared God, you've tried to clarify your view of God. Let's get it to where it needs to be. Let's obey the gospel. Let's do the work that endures to eternal life. You've done work here, and I'm not saying that that will get you to heaven. It certainly won't. But I don't want to undermine the role of good deeds among non-Christians.



Matter of fact, let's write that down. Number two, this man is a quote unquote a good man. I say, quote unquote, God uses the word, he's devout, he's pious. And there are a lot of quote unquote, good people you know. And I know that we're so theologically, once we get kind of turned on to depravity or the doctrines of grace, we love saying things like, you know, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" And you say, "Well, they don't." That's clever. But there are people you know, that you'd say, "This is a good man. This is a good woman. These are good people. This is a good family." And I'm just saying, let's not just play theological word games and say, well, they're not good. Well, I guess there is a sense in which they're not good. They're all under sin and they're no better off than any other sinner, including the people we read about in our news feeds. But the good is good.

Let me take you through a couple of things. Right? He is pious. He's praying. He's giving. He's fearing God. Let's go to Psalm 11. The last verse of that chapter, verse 7 Psalm 11. I want us not to think like God as a computer program. I know that we need the transaction of justification for me to have eternal life and to qualify for the inheritance, I get that. I'm not going to heaven without that transaction. And while I cannot be adopted into the family without going through the portal of trusting in Christ, I do know this: that God wants there to be good leaders and good workers and good employers and good employees and good neighbors and good citizens and good people. And although that's a relative term among lost people, I want to be in favor of that for a few reasons.

Let's look at this one. Psalm Chapter 11 verse 7, "For the Lord is righteous; and he loves righteous deeds." Well he must just love his own deeds because that's the only person who is righteous, because that's what Jesus said, "No one's good but God alone." I get that. In the absolute sense only God could do a righteous deed. But people do righteous deeds because God is providing the ability for these people to do things that would rightly fall under the category and the biblical definition of "that was a good thing." Have you ever seen a non-Christian do a good thing? Did YOU do any good things before you got saved? Well, technically, I'm going to say "all my righteousness is filthy rags." It is unacceptable to save you.

And I get with sympathy the people who write these things that it is Satan's job to get everyone good and moral in the United States and therefore they never feel their need for the gospel. Well, I want everyone to be good and moral in the United States. I'm in favor of that. I'd also like them to see their need for the gospel. Right? It can be both/and. It needs to be both/and because I know this, the Lord loves righteous deeds and I know what he's talking about here are the deeds that human beings say, and I know that because he's not talking about looking in the mirror, "the upright shall behold his face." Guess what Cornelius was having in his non-Christian, pre-Christian life? An increasingly clear view of God. He feared him. He knew he was dependent on him. He knew he needed to pray to him. That was an important thing. He was starting to behold God and in that beholding of God as a non-Christian what he needed was "the glory of God in the face of Christ," as we read in our Daily Bible Reading this morning. That's what we need. We need to finish that. We need to see the greatness of God in the only provision of payment for sin. We need to see Christ dying on the



cross as "the Lamb of God that takes away the sin" of Cornelius. That's what needs to be seen.

Well, "the Lord loves righteous deeds and the upright shall behold his face." That's a good thing. I want our nation to be godly. Righteousness exalts any people. It exalts a nation. Sin is a disgrace to any people. I get that. Let's not be dumb. We want good things in society. We want good things in our offices. We want good things in our business. We want good things in our neighborhood. But don't become complacent and listen to the theologians that like to talk about the fact, "Oh, that would be so blinding to their need for Christ," and realize that's true. Right? You cannot be saved by being a good person. And if you stop sharing the gospel with people who you think are good people, you'll miss the point entirely. Philip needed to go to the good guy, the Ethiopian eunuch, and clarify his need for Christ and see him get baptized. The apostle Paul had to have Ananias explained to him The Way. We needed now Cornelius to encounter Peter to make Peter be this vessel of clarity about, OK, "How do I understand this God who has provided a payment for my sins?" And all that's going to take place.

Psalm 7. OK, let's go back to Psalm 7. The other side of this, and one of the reasons I want our society, I want non-Christians to live good lives isn't because I think good lives and good deeds will save them. It will not save them, they need the gospel, they got to repent of their sins and put their trust in Christ, even though they're living morally upstanding, what the Bible calls in Acts 10, pious lives. But I know this: the more unrighteous my neighbors are, if they're Canaanites, I know this is a bad thing because I love God and God does not like unrighteous. And not only does "he love righteous deeds" Psalm 11:7, but invert those numbers to get to Psalm 7 verse 11, "God is a righteous judge." Look at that verse 7:11. "God is a righteous judge." And I know this: every sin has to be dealt with. God is going to judge every sin.

Either every sin I've committed is going to be laid on Christ and he's going to punish Christ instead of me, or they're going to have to be punished. He's a righteous judge. And when he sees people doing things that are unrighteous, guess what he feels. God is a God who feels indignation every day. Because the context in verse 12, "If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; and bend and readied his bow." There's judgment coming for non-Christians because of their increasing immoral acts. And some of you think it's just like two rooms. You go into the good room, you go into the bad room. You understand this is not how it works.

The books are going to be opened in the Great White Throne and people will be judged "according to their deeds," what they've done. I want my neighbor to do less bad deeds. Why? Well, because of this: in Romans Chapter 2, it says the non-Christians "with impenitent hearts are storing up for themselves wrath," judgment, for the day of God's judgment, "the day of God's righteous judgment." So I don't want them to do that. I don't want our nation to be sinful. I don't want our nation to be engaged in the perversion and abortion and everything else that it is involved in, because God's judgment comes on that. And it's not just because I live in the neighborhood that I don't want that to happen. I don't want that to happen for their sake, they are going to be punished. And I want them to be good persons. A good person.



Well, no one can be absolutely good. Only God is good. I understand. When Christ says that he turns around and calls other people good, what are we talking about? It's derived. It's the grace of God, common grace of God, the effectual calling grace of God. But we've got to, number two, "Value the Role of Good Deeds." And let me say that not only because good is good and God doesn't like iniquity, he's indignant about it, he's angry about it and he's pleased with, he loves righteous deeds. But here's a reason, because if my neighbor starts to curtail their desires to do the right thing, I know this, that you're going to have to curtail your desires to do the ultimate right thing, and that is to obey the gospel, which is to put your trust in Christ. Because that's not natural. You're going to have to do something against your will. You're going to have to say, "I no longer want to trust in my resume. I want to trust in Christ and what he's done."

So here's the thing. To quote Romans 6, there is a body of teaching to which we must be obedient, right? Here's a phrase you can look up in your Bible software, "to obey the gospel," right? It starts in Romans 1. I'm thinking of that great discussion about people in Romans 6 being either a slave to their own desires and unrighteousness and they become enslaved to that. Or they start becoming obedient and the ultimate obedience is to the form of "teaching that was delivered to you." And here's what I want to tell Cornelius. Trust in Christ, repent of your sins. Follow Christ. He says, "be baptized," then get baptized. He says, "give," then give. And give now with a clear picture of what God wants from his people, Read the Bible. Share the good news of the gospel that he sent his Son the only way to be saved through Christ. Tell all your Roman coworkers. This is what needs to happen, obedience. And obedience in doing what he was doing is setting him up for the next act of obedience. Who do we give credit to for that? God. God gets credit for all of it.

But let's think practically now. I want my neighbors to be good people because that means they're going to have to fight the bad impulses they have, which if they didn't fight them, they'd become the Canaanites. I don't want them to be a Canaanites. I want to be a neighbor to an upstanding human being, but I don't want to put my feet up on my porch, look across at him and think, "Well, he doesn't need the gospel because he's fine." Will he be storing up less wrath for the day of God's judgment? Yes. Is that good for him? Yes, that is good. That's better for him. That's less punishment for him. It's like those car chases you see when they're chasing and you know that, you know, all of a sudden they start and "you ran another red light. You turn right and you're evading..." You just rack up more debt. You might as well just pull over after being chased for five minutes rather than fifty minutes or five hours. Right? I'm just thinking, stop. I want my neighbors to stop sinning as much as possible.

And all I'm telling you, the role of good deeds is preparatory. It's the grace of God. It's the common grace of God, it's the effectual calling and the grace of God that's engaged in that. Good deeds have a role for so many reasons. I was quoting Romans Chapter 2 verses 1 through 4. So many passages about hearing the good news and responding to it obediently. Jesus comes and commands them to repent and trust in Christ. Mark 1:14 and 15. All of that obedience to the gospel. Second Thessalonians 1:8, First Peter 4:17, all of that is what I want. It's an extension of a man who in this case tells his kids to stop using the Lord's name in vain or whatever he's telling me to do. I'm doing an obedient good thing. The ultimate good



thing is do the work that God requires to trust ultimately in Christ. And then from that point on, there's even more obedience, obviously.

All right, the messenger, let's get back to our passage, Acts Chapter 10 in a sermon that's way too long, circuitous. Verse 3, "About the ninth hour of the day, he saw in a vision an angel of God come in and say, 'Cornelius.' You stared at him in terror and said, 'What does it Lord?' He said to him, 'Your prayers and your alms,'" all you're giving, ""has ascended as a memorial before God." God likes it. He remembers it. "Now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who's called Peter. He's lodging at another guy's house named Simon with a Simon, he's a tanner, whose house is by the sea." And he goes and he does it. All I'm telling you is this act of here's a man who's responded to the things that God's wanted him to do, like, I don't know, fear him, pray to him, give out of a gratitude that God enables him and gives him everything he has. All of that is good.

Now, God is saying now I got the next step. All I want to see now is I want to turn the tables, and some of you have been waiting for this, and say, OK, it isn't just about people seeking him, although that is a legitimate linguistic way to describe what God is doing in pre-Christian grace, getting people to seek him. But the seeking of him is nothing other than a reflection of God seeking them, because that's what he's doing. God zeroed in on him and said, "OK, I'm going to bring the pastor of the church to your house. I want you to encounter him so that he can lead you to repentance and faith."

Number three, I put it this way. You and I need to "Praise God for His Pursuit of People," his pursuit of people. The Bible says and I already quoted Isaiah 55, "Seek him while he may be found." Here's the problem, we know without God seeking us, we would never seek him. Think this through, Isaiah 53, as long as we're thinking of the Old Testament prophets. Isaiah, 53, says, "We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way." So we're wandering sheep. Maybe you don't remember Ezekiel 34, but here is the exact inverse of us seeking God. You guys should seek God. It's like me standing on a mountain and saying to all the wandering sheep, "Seek God." Well, here's how Ezekiel 34 puts it to quote it accurately in verse 11, he says, "Thus says the Lord: Behold, I myself will search for my sheep and I will seek them out as a shepherd seeks out his flock when he's among the sheep that have been scattered, so I'm going to seek out my sheep. I'm going to rescue them."

That picture of God seeking his people, it coincides perfectly with the human responsibility for you to respond to God's call for you to seek him. There's an internal call. There is a natural theology call, there's even a prophetically special revelation call for Cornelius to seek the God, the real God, who is not the pantheon of gods in Rome. And he's seeking that God, but he's only seeking that God because God is seeking him. And we know that here by the injection of here's an angel, he's going to tell you what to do and now here's a pastor, he's going to tell you what to do and I'm seeking, I'm lining this all up. Just to go back again to Acts 17. He's putting people in place and he's crossing paths of people and having them do what he wants done because he's out seeking them. Jesus says, "I've come to seek and save the lost." He's seeking. God is seeking.



Some say, "You've spent a lot of time talking about the fact that we seek God." Yeah, but it's the grace of God I've said and I've said that in almost a passive way, although I'm trying to make it a very active thing, God is actively engaging and sustaining the interest of some of your non-Christian friends in God, just like before you came to Christ, you had this growing, budding, this accelerating interest in knowing God. OK? Now I'm saying all of that really is something we should stand back and say, "Well, that's God seeking us and God is going after us." That's the whole picture in Scripture is a shepherd seeking the lost sheep and pulling them to himself. I mean, that's how you started, right? John 6:44, "No one comes to me unless the Father draws him." So God is the one doing all of this. And this is the tension, of course, we have between the reality of me going, "Oh, you tell me I need to seek God, I need to fear God, I need to pray. OK? I'm going to do that. That's my human responsibility." And now I have God saying that if that's happening it's because I'm seeking you.

I mean, even the wordplay in passages like First Peter Chapter 2 verse 25, "You were straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." I mean, just all of it's conflated right there in one verse. You were just out there wandering and then you came and you turned and you came to the shepherd. I mean, it's like Jesus says in John 10. It's like, "My sheep, they hear my voice. They hear my voice and they come and they follow me." Wait, I thought you were seeking them." "I am seeking them and that's why they hear me." This is the interesting conflation. This interesting antinomy as J.I. Packer says of this whole human responsibility and divine sovereignty and God doing the work to get you to himself. And that happened, I trust in your life, if you can look back at a point of repentance and faith and justification and indwelling of the Spirit.

Now I'm just thinking, what about in other people's lives? Do you see God pursuing anyone around you and you'll know that by one sign is they have an interest in spiritual things. They have an interest in the Bible. You bring up something or you might even talk with them and they say, "Well, I have been reading my Bible lately." You respond, "What? You must be saved." Nope. Don't go there. Right? They're not saved just because they're reading their Bibles. "Well, I've been praying lately a lot. My mom's in the hospital, so I've been praying for her." You think, "Oh, great. A brother in Christ." You don't know that they're brothers in Christ. Right? Peter showed up to say you're not a brother in Christ. You need to be a brother in Christ. And all I'm telling you, you need to look around at how God is working in the lives of people around you and say, you know, Christ came to seek and save the lost and he's sending people like Philip.

Read again sometime what we studied in Acts 8, where Philip is like a projectile out of the muzzle of God's sovereign work. Like "Philip, go there and join this guy in the chariot." And then when he was done, it was almost... we couldn't even figure out whether it was a miraculous event and he got teleported or what happened. But then he shot off to some other place. God is playing chess and he wants to move you. You're the little pawn. He wants to move your life and my life into a place where we engage in that work. I mean, the ultimate picture of God seeking, speaking of shepherds and sheep, is Luke 15, when he tells a story about a sheep that's wandering and the shepherd goes and finds him. When he finds him he



puts him on the shoulder rejoicing, everyone rejoicing. Yay! "So it is heaven will rejoice when one sinner who repents."

It's like a widow who lost the coin. She didn't have a lot of money, but she lost the coin, she sweeps the house, she moves furniture around, lights a lamp. She finds it and calls her neighbors and says I found it. She's seeking that. Then a story which seems like the father's a lot more passive, but it's seeking, because we don't see it in the human reality of going under the bushels. But we got a father who's got a lost son who's out there, flagrante lifestyle. And the father is, the whole depiction of the context, is seeking the son, this son who is lost. He waits every day out by the front. That seems very passive, but we know from theology is not passive. We know from the preceding two parables it's not passive. God is out there seeking. His spirit is going and grabbing and pulling him through the pods of the sow and the pigsty and bringing that kid to his senses. He came to his senses.

Well, that's not inherent in you. You'll never come to your senses because you're dead in your transgressions. But God starts pulling. Is there anyone in your life like that? Maybe they've hit bottom or maybe they're like the thief on the cross. Maybe they're like Cornelius. Maybe they're like the Ethiopian eunuch. Maybe they're like Paul. But you need to say I need to be open-eyed to use that term. Let's go in our thinking... we'll end with this. I know I'm way too long here, but...

Jesus, woman at the well, the woman at the well goes into town, town of Sychar, coming across the valley. The apostles are there and he says, "Lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest." Here they come. They're seeking me based on the testimony of the woman at the well. She says, "I think I found the Messiah. I think this is the guy." They're all coming. And he says, listen, would you engage in the work "that the one who sows and the one who reaps can rejoice together?"

I know so much of evangelism, it feels like a duty and it's scary and "I don't know. What if I have to argue with...?" There are people out there who are, as we like to say, low-hanging fruit. They are interested. God is already at work in their life. He is seeking them. And we know he's seeking them because they're seeking God. That's an evidence of God seeking. And I just want us to open our eyes. I'd like you to clean up your testimony. I'd like to be clear about that. But even if that takes a matter of weeks or months, I want us to at least have our eyes open, look around. What is God doing? It's just like he's using the laws that he's created and he's engaging, even at an atomic level, to keep everything working in your body and the universe. He's also at work with people who say, "I'm done with sin, I'm tired of the addictions, I'm tired of the licentiousness, I want to get right with God." That's the work of God. And it's time for us to hear from Christ who says, "Get your eyes open and get into the harvest."

Be Philip, be willing to be shot out of that barrel and into a conversation this week. Be Peter, who's going to have a hard time. What do we call him? The next week's sermon is called the Reluctant Evangelist, right? Peter is reluctant for a lot of reasons to go talk to the Roman centurion. Well, let's get past all of that. That's a setup for next week. A terrible ending of the sermon there, guys, but I'm out of time.



Let's pray. God, give us even this morning a better sense of the things that we don't normally think of. Your involvement in the world. Though this wasn't a sermon about creation, you know, the whole earth is full of your glory, not just the physics of the world. But allow us to digest food and enjoy fellowship and relationships and music and all of that. But morally, thank you that we live even with all the bad things that have happened lately in our country, in a country that is better than others. And for that, God, we're thankful and we want it to be better still. We want people to see the folly of sin and we want them to pursue you. We want to be the vessel of information to help them understand what Christianity really is and what they need to do. We don't want to have them blinded by their good deeds. We certainly know that's a temptation, but we don't want them to be evil and storing up for themselves more judgment for the day of God's righteous judgment. God, please let us think rightly about these very nuanced topics in Scripture that ultimately we might be obedient to go out in the world this week, talk about you, to look back at our own Christian life and see when that point of justification took place for us. So God use what was said here this morning, I trust is an accurate reflection of your word to nourish us and equip us and drive us and fuel us through this week.

In Jesus name. Amen.