



Amazing Conversions 8

Cornelius: Reluctant Evangelists

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We now find ourselves 50 sermons into our study of the book of the Bible called The Acts of the Apostles. I just want to remind you this morning, were it not for the fact that the apostles acted, humanly speaking at least, we would not be here studying this book, nor would we even be trusting in Jesus Christ had they not done the hard thing of acting on the instructions that Christ gave them. And that's how the book started. Remember Chapter 1? Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem till the Spirit came into their lives and that they would then be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth.

And doing what Christ said, acting on that set of instructions, is something that's very difficult as we've been reading and studying throughout this book the last 50 sermons. It had sometimes cost them a great deal. Their freedom, certainly their comfort. They had been brought before the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of the nation, and they had gone through a lot to be faithful to do what they were told to do. It's not just the apostles. You need to think about all the subsequent generations of Christians who have been faithful to do what the apostles did and act on the instructions of the Lord Jesus Christ to do what he said we all should be doing, and that is to share the message of Jesus to those around them. Were that not happening, humanly speaking, throughout this history in the last two thousand years, we would not be here in church today studying the Bible, studying the Acts of the Apostles and learning about Christ. They needed to do that as hard as that is. And I say hard, I keep saying it's hard, but it's not that it's complex.

I think you need to understand that difference. Right? It's exceedingly simple to open your mouth and to talk about Christ, to say things like, "Well, where do you think you stand with God?" As we think about Cornelius, we met last week, this Roman centurion. He was a very moral, upstanding guy. He was generous. He was praying. And he might think, "Well, I'm fine." But Peter had to do the hard thing. This apostle had to do the hard thing of going and saying, well, what you need, there's something missing here. What you need is to trust in Christ because your righteousness isn't going to attain your salvation. So this message was going to be hard and sometimes it would cost them greatly. And sometimes they had reasons that they did not want to do this. They had in this case that we're going to study today theological reasons that they weren't going to do it.

And I just got to tell you what summarizes kind of all of the feel of what we see in the book of Acts to this point is what I tried to capture in the title of the sermon this morning. And that is the word reluctant. Now, there are a lot of reluctant evangelists and we'll see Peter in that role this morning. And I don't think it's hard for us to think about our own reluctance when we think about opening up our mouths and saying things like, "Well, where do you think you're going to go when you die?" And to bring up a conversation that's going to lead to a message of Christ and salvation, that's not always easy to do. It is going to be something that is much like the reluctance you would have if you were standing on the perch of a rock formation, looking down on a lake like most of us did at one time or another. And, you know, as students or



teenagers or young people just saying, "OK, others have jumped, they're in the water, they're saying it's great. What a great thing this was. It was fun. Come on, jump. Go ahead." And as you stand there, you know, several feet over the surface of the lake, there's all of this reluctance.

And it's not that it's difficult. You've been walking for a long time. All you have to do is take one step. It's just that it's very scary when the fear and timidity of our own lives thinking, "Well, what's going to happen if I do this? Am I going to, you know, fall and go in crooked or maybe massively crooked? Am I going to belly flop? I don't know how cold the water is." All these things in our minds make us pause. And the more we pause, we engage in that kind of paralysis by analysis. It gets harder and harder to do the thing that in that case that we are beckoned to do by others and in our case, in evangelism, what Christ has called us to do, he expects us to do what the Scripture has been saying from the very beginning about all Christians. "You're going to come and follow me and I'm going to make you fishers of men. I'm going to make you evangelists to other people. I'm going to endow you with a title, a very noble title of being my ambassador in your generation. You're going to go and make disciples of all the nations." These kinds of instructions laid upon us, then it makes it incumbent upon us as Christians to act on those instructions.

And I think the passage we're going to look at today, if you haven't turned there already, we're in Acts Chapter 10, we met Cornelius last week. He sent a dispatch of people from Caesarea on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea down to Joppa, where Peter was staying. And Peter is going to have theological apprehension about this. There's a lot of pressure for him not to share the gospel in this case. In other passages, there were other reasons and a lot of price tags involved in sharing the gospel, but in this case there was a theological reason.

Now, here's the thing about preaching this passage to you this morning. None of you have the theological excuse that Peter has. That's not what we're dealing with. But some of you do carry a theological excuse with you that I'd like to address using the paradigm of Peter struggling theologically with this to at least help you think through the theological concerns that sometimes keep us from opening our mouth. And they become an excuse, frankly, for not raising the ire of people or engaging in conversation that turns to argumentation, and all the reasons we're afraid and timid to share the gospel. Our theological problem, and I would just address and suss out as the pastor here in the 21st century in our church is probably a theological excuse that is depicted in the phrase I've used a couple of times already in this introduction, and that is the phrase, "humanly speaking."

If I say to you, we would not be here were it not for the acts of the apostles. Right? Humanly speaking, we would not be here. You would say, well, I go to Compass Bible Church. I have a high view of Scripture. I believe in God's sovereignty. I know that he's a God who gets his job done. You quote often passages like Jesus is going to build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. And he's the good shepherd. And his voice is going to go out and his sheep are going to hear his voice and his sheep are going to follow him and he's going to give them eternal life. I mean, this is all on Christ. Christ is doing this.



I read Ephesians 1. He has purposed before the foundation of the world to save the people he's going to save and so I just know he's going to get it done. Because you start talking about things like, well, we wouldn't be here were it not for some evangelist in the first century or some people sharing the gospel in our past or someone in, you know, a generation or two previous. Well, I'm sure God would get it done somehow. We can rely on the sovereignty of God that oftentimes becomes an excuse theologically for us not to engage in doing the hard work. And by that, I don't mean that it's complicated. I just mean that it's viscerally difficult to engage in evangelism. And I want to get that out of the way, much like God had to get Peter's theological excuses out of the way.

So let's take a look at this passage, knowing he's dealing with a completely different problem that we should understand and I, as your pastor, should give you some information to help you think through that historically and theologically. But just keep in mind that his problem is probably not your problem. But whatever your problem might be in blaming something on God for why you're not sharing the gospel, I'd like to get rid of it. Matter of fact, let's even give the point before we read it. Can we do that? I know I rarely do that, but let's jot it down, because I've already said this in several ways but I want to give you a deep theological word. Ditch. Number one on your outline: "Ditch Any Theological Excuse." Get rid of it. Obliterate it. This is what this passage is all about.

So let's read it once you jot that down, it's in Acts Chapter 10, we're going to read beginning in verse number 9 and we're going to read all the way through verse 20, which I know cuts us off in the middle of this narrative. But I've already warned you this is going to be a four-part discussion of Cornelius, the first Roman here to come to faith in Christ. I mean, he's not worshipping at the temple. He's not at the Day of Pentecost here as some kind of proselyte to Judaism. He is a full-blown Roman Italian who is just in Israel only because he's there on assignment because of the military. That's it. And so Peter is now going to have to share the gospel with him and the dispatch of people are on the way and it starts and picks up in verse number 9 again. Let's pick it up here. Acts 10 verse 9.

"The next day, as they were," the dispatch from Cornelius' house, "were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter," our apostle, was about to act again, "went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray." Now remember our reckoning of time. We got that in the last text. We just need to calculate that. That means it's noon. So it's noon, you're in Joppa, not far from the Mediterranean coast. You probably got a nice little breeze up there. The top of the house was where they would go to sometimes they'd have patios up there like some houses today and it was very common in the first century in Israel. And so they had a house. They had a little patio up there. He goes up there, it's midday and he's praying. He goes up to pray. And of course, he's also hungry because it's noon, right? I'm hungry around 10:30 in the morning but he's at noon here and he's ready to eat and he "wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance." Now that's an interesting word. It's not used very often, but the idea of some kind of weird vision he's about to have, that's not quite like a dream. It's not like he's asleep at night. But God is going to reveal some things to him as an apostle.

Very important that he authorized this expansion of the gospel from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and now to this metaphorical end of the earth to see this Italian come to faith in Christ. So he is there in this trance and he's going to be given this vision. "I saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth." Which if you think about having a rooftop patio, you might have what I would think you would have if you're there in a sunny coastal city of Joppa, you might have like an awning up of some kind, a pop up like we have out here on the patio. So you can kind of imagine you leaning back, he's smelling lunch being prepared. He's praying, trying to focus on prayer. He falls into this trance. He's about to get communication from God. And it's like that awning over his head, which I assume he has, is like now it's coming down out of the sky and it's about to be described. What's in it?

Verse 12. "In it were all kinds of animals," emphasis on ALL KINDS of animals, "and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him: 'Rise, Peter, kill and eat.' And Peter said, 'By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.' And the voice came to him again a second time, 'What God has made clean do not call common.' This happened three times, and the thing was taken up into heaven. Now, while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house," is this the tanner's house, Simon the Tanner. "They stood at the gate and they called on to ask whether Simon," Simon the apostle, "Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. While Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are looking for you, rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.'"

We're going to pick it up next time. We're going to study what happens next. But in this particular passage, we have Peter being prepared to go on a journey not too far, but to travel and to go to Caesarea Maritime on the coast of the Mediterranean, in Israel, and he's going to share the gospel at high cost, matter of fact. Look down further just to get a little sense of what the apprehension would be. Look at verse 28. I know we're jumping into the next passage. Look at verse 28 as he's recalling this. He says, "And he said to them, 'You yourselves know,'" this is Acts 10:28, "'how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or visit any one of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.'" So you can see the parallel just by reading verse 28 as to what's happening here with the law, which the Jew would have to follow in terms of his dietary restrictions, because Leviticus Chapter 11 describes all of the things you as a Jew in the Old Testament could eat and not eat. Today we call it kosher eating, right? This is something that is prescribed that you can eat versus something you can't eat.

Now, the rabbis have added some layers to this, but the basic dietary restrictions are given to us in Leviticus Chapter 11, I say to us, to Israel, that was going to distinguish their menu from everyone else in the ancient world. And it is a little complicated and weird, right? You start looking through them when you say all kinds of animals, there are lots of animals that were described that you could eat. If they had the split hooves and they chew the cud, I mean, you got to figure out how this animal functions, which is easier in an agrarian society than us today. But they would clearly differentiate between, say, a horse, you know, or a mule versus



the bison or the caribou or cattle. I mean, they could say, "OK, well, that's OK, but this is not OK. I can't eat a donkey." Right?

And then there are fish. Right? The fish have to have scales and gills. So there are fish that you can eat. Sorry, sushi eaters, you couldn't eat in the Old Testament, you couldn't eat, you know, any kind of Kamari, you can't eat squid. I don't know if you're tempted to do that. You can't eat jellyfish. Lots of different sea life that you can eat. Right? You can't eat the lobster. But you can eat bass and you could eat all kinds of fish, I'm not a fisherman, with scales and fins, OK? You could eat various insects, not that you're tempted to do that, depending on what kind it was. Certain kinds of grasshoppers and locusts. You remember John the Baptist came eating locusts, certain kinds of quadrupeds you could not eat, and then reptiles. That's why it's interesting that the word reptiles here, because that's like just there was no list for that. Just no reptiles. Don't eat any reptiles.

So here was this weird list. And people ask sometimes they say, "Pastor, why that list? Why that?" And oftentimes some people say, well, let me tell you why and they bring me a book about some medical doctor in Nebraska or something that says, "Well, here's why the rules were and these are actually better and there are more enzymes or it's better for your digestive system or, you know." Here's the reason why. Because God said so. I mean, that's the reason. Matter of fact, when he goes through all of this in Leviticus 11, at the end he says, "Do this because I'm the Lord your God. I'm holy. I'm totally different than you guys. And you're going to be holy, totally different than everybody else."

And one of the problems is in the ancient Near East, much like today, but even more so then, your social interaction was done in meals. Right? You could not just go and eat anywhere, because now all of a sudden I got all these weird rules about what I can't eat and what I can eat. All the kosher stuff versus the non-kosher stuff to use modern terminology, it would distinguish where I could eat. I couldn't go to anybody's banquet. I couldn't eat whatever was put before me. As a matter of fact, it uses words like this. The foods that are not on the kosher list should be "detestable to you." So you have to in your mind now come up with a way to say, OK, these things are going to be detestable. A ham and cheese omelet should be detestable, which is almost impossible to do. But, you know, bacon, right? BLT, right? A ham sandwich and all of that. Just you cannot even like it. You got to see it as detestable.

It's much like asking why the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And again, all your back to basically the fundamental answer is because God said so, like you pull on your kids every now and then. Why? Well, because I said so. At some point, authority is going to overrule your understanding of why this. I'm not even sure there is a "why" that we could ever trace out or describe to you in some book. And I've read the books. Right? I've read Ellen G. White and Keys to Health. And, you know, I get why they think it's better for you to eat certain Old Testament kosher rules from Leviticus 11. But I'm telling you, all of that is to me, it just the secondary and most of it, I think, is fanciful double talk. Because the bottom line is God just said you're not going to eat like everyone else. You eat over a thousand meals a year. Right? Some of us eat way more than that. We eat a lot of meals. And he says you got to give thought to every one of those. Why? Because you're going to be different than everyone else.



Now, all of this is going to be reversed. I mean, think about Acts 1:8. That's where we started. "You're going to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria," these half-breed Syrian Jewish people, and then "the ends of the earth." You're talking like barbarians, Scythians, slave, free from Achaea and Macedonia, ancient Greece and Italy and just the whole ends of the earth. This message is for everyone. This message is for everyone? You don't understand, perhaps, if you're not thinking in a Jewish mindset how radical that is. Right? I can't even walk down the road with someone who's a gentile if I'm a faithful Orthodox Jew. And now all of a sudden I'm supposed to see them as my evangelistic prospect? How is that? Because even when Jesus was here, he told his disciples, only go to the villages in the cities of the children of the lost house of Israel. Only Jewish people. We even see him turning down people, at least initially, like the Syrophenician woman. No, you're from Phoenicia. No, you can't. This is for my children. This is for the Israelites. I am the Jewish messiah for the Jewish people.

I mean, think about that just repeatedly. Even when Jesus has a discussion in John 4 with a woman at the well who is a Samaritan woman. I mean, she first says, "Why in the world are you talking to me? I'm a Samaritan." And Jesus says, "A time is coming," and the age has started because the messiah is standing in front of you "and now is," "when neither in that mountain nor in this one." Right? When neither in Jerusalem or Gerizim, where the Samaritans worshipped. It's not about that. All of this stuff is about to go away. He's talking in terms about the epic, an era that he's in, this transitional era of the messiah coming on earth. And this whole thing is going to be a transition from all this exclusive stuff about the nation of Israel to where now all of a sudden this message of the Jewish messiah is going to be for the nations.

And it's not entirely different. Maybe a weak illustration, but like you raising your children, right? If you got a five-year-old, you're expecting him to live in the bedroom that you've furnished for him. Right? "You live here. This is your home." But if you're thoughtful as a parent, you're thinking about what the Scriptures say regarding you as a warrior with your children, shooting them into the world. Well, don't shoot them into the world when they're three. Right? But my kids don't check in with me now, right? I don't know what they're doing. Well, I assume what they're doing, they're at church this morning, doing their things. But they are out there doing... I don't know what their schedules are. They are affecting the world. They're beyond my domestic sequestering within my home. That's the goal of parenting to move them out. But I expected them to come back to the house every night when they were kids. I raised them under my tutelage. Right? The management and stewardship that I had in their life was there for certain things to be built into them and then send them out into the world.

And in a sense, Israel was exclusively cordoned off, starting with Abraham in Genesis Chapter 12, and the descendants were then to be exclusively identified, holy, set apart from everyone else. They had a special diet and special rules and ceremonies and all of that. The law was going to be given in Moses, which is about 600 years after Abraham, we were going to have revelation now codified in what would end up being 39 books of the Old Testament.



All of it's going to lead through this rise of a monarchy that he is going to sovereignly prepare through David. And the son of David will then be the ultimate king, he will also be the ultimate priest and sacrifice himself so that God's punishment can fall on him. There will be a payment for sin. There will be leadership provided, and he'll be God himself speaking to you. When he speaks it will be the mouth of the Lord and we will have now prophet, priest and king coming through Israel. And then all of a sudden, guess what? It's opened up to the world.

And it's not only like in the Old Testament when it says in Isaiah, for instance, that you are going to be a light to the nations. Like, "We'll set up Israel over there and if you want truth, you can go be a proselyte and join Israel." But now they're going to be like lasers and they're going to shoot out from Israel and they're going to go establish the people of God in all those places. There's going to be this now missionary effort as opposed to, "If you want to be with us, you can come be with us and become a Jew and be a proselyte. You won't be an ethnic Jew, but you can be a religious Jew." Well, now it was no, "No matter where you're at, you don't have to come to the festivals. You don't have to eat like us. You don't have to dress like us. You can shave the side of your head if you like. You don't have to have a priest. You don't have to have a temple. We now have the Messiah and the Messiah is the substance of all that God was planning."

And he dropped that hint at the very beginning. I mean, it was more than a hint in Genesis 12, that Abrahamic covenant was, "I'm going to choose you. I'm going to work through you and through the tutelage of this nation, I'm going to produce law and I'm going to produce governing documents and I'm going to produce a messiah. And then all of the families of the earth will be blessed in this one family." That was God's plan. And part of the distinguishing feature of cordoning off and sequestering that nation was their dietary restrictions. And so all of that was symbolic of the fact that now that it has been a complete sea change, a whole completely different set of rules, as it says in Hebrews Chapter 9, the regulations of food and washings, all of that's done because, as it ramps up into the punch line in Hebrews Chapter 10 verse 1, all of that was "a shadow of the things that were to come." But now the substance is in Christ.

And now that Christ is here, guess what? All the other stuff goes away. The whole ninth chapter of Hebrews was about the fact that the temple is totally not needed. Christ had the temple veil ripped when he died. All of this is passé. It is absolutely no longer vogue. And now what you eat doesn't matter. And don't let anybody tell you it does. Right? Not that any of you were really stumbling over that. We seem to eat anything they put in front of us now. But the point is, if anyone starts to tell you that, whether it's about "Sabbath day or new moon or festival or what you eat," the dietary restrictions, Colossians 1 says no, no one can act in your judge in that regard anymore because "Christ is the substance of all of that." The whole point of Hebrews beginning in Chapter 4 was the Sabbath itself is fulfilled. All the dietary restrictions are fulfilled, the priesthood is fulfilled, the ceremonial laws are fulfilled. All of the ceremony that was to point to Christ is now gone because the Christ it was pointing to has arrived.



Now we preach Christ and him crucified and we draw people to that and we point them to Christ. And no longer do we need dietary restrictions to cordon off Israel. Now, that was hard for someone who went through the struggle, even in Jesus' ministry, to look at Gentiles and go, "I guess right now it's not for them." And even as Jesus talked to the woman at the well, he reminded her salvation is of the Jews. It comes through us. Right? Salvation, right? The power of God unto salvation. This gospel that we're preaching "to the Jew first and then also to the Greek," the non-Jew. And all of this has come to fruition and now Peter's going to have to take heat from other Jews, as we learn in Galatians, to say, "OK, dietary laws don't matter. I can hang out at your house. I can share the gospel with you. I can count you as much a child of God as I am, even though you're not even a genetic child of Abraham." That was gigantic.

Now, that was a theological struggle he had to get over. And one of the ways he did it was a day in which he was hungry God gave him this vision and it was very clear that you no longer should call food unclean and you should no longer call people unclean. Everyone is your evangelistic target. Everyone from every tongue, tribe and nation God is going to go and use you as an apostle and your descendants of theological and spiritual descendants. The disciples are going to reach into every nation of the world. And that's why we sit here as Gentiles on the other side of the world 2,000 years later, worshiping the Jewish messiah and we can go out and have bacon for brunch. All of that is all about God fulfilling his plan. And no longer is there a theological excuse as to who you shouldn't be sharing the gospel with.

Now, all of that just to explain the Sunday school lesson for you. Now, to preach to you to say, hey, but what is your theological excuse? Is it that you're concerned that you are not needed, that really ultimately God is sovereign, God is going to save whoever he wants? I've read those passages, I believe that. You talk about humanly speaking, we're not about human centrality around here, we're about God's centrality. We're about the high view of God.

Now I get all that. But let me blow your mind here. I don't know if it'll blow your mind, but let me say something to you that may help you. I quoted John 10. Let me quote it again now. "My sheep," that means people I have picked out, people that I'm going to say "will hear my voice," Jesus says. Well wait a minute, you're going to go up and be ensconced at the right hand of the Father. Your voice isn't going to be here. Right? "But my voice is going to go out. My sheep are going to hear my voice, they're going to follow me. They're going to respond obediently, trusting me, following me, salvation, the savior and Lord to these people. And I'll give them eternal life." Seems like it's all on him.

Here's another tenth chapter from a book that God wrote, Romans Chapter 10. Here he asked this question, theoretical question, and it's rhetorical, but "How are they going to hear unless someone," proclaims it to them, it's translated, "preaches to them?" And I hate that because you think of someone standing on a platform with a microphone in a spotlight. That's not the point. The point is someone's got to TELL them this message. Someone has to say to Cornelius who feels like he's fine with God, "Hey, you're not fine with God until you have Christ. You need Christ, you need to be clothed in Christ. You need to trust in Christ. The Jewish messiah needs to be your messiah." That has to happen.



And all I'm saying is your theological excuse may sound a lot like when William Carey stood there in Northampton Shire, England, after having a map on his wall where he worked as a cobbler and a part-time pastor, and he said, "I've been looking at this map thinking about people who need to hear the message of the gospel and they don't have a missionary there." He said, "I think we need to go." And the pastors looked at him and said, quote, a famous quote, "If God wants them saved he'll do it without your help." And I think some of us think, "Well, there are non-Christians at my workplace. There are non-Christians in my neighborhood. There are non-Christians on my kid's little league team. But you know what? If God wants him saved, he's got the marked out from eternity past, he's going to get them saved."

Let me remind you of this - to take John 10 and Romans 10 and to put them together. And for God to say it is necessary for Christ's voice to go out and he will accomplish salvation in people who he has picked from the foundation of the world and he will save them, his voice will go out, they will respond. They'll hear his voice and they'll follow him and he'll give them eternal life. This has to, in our mind, coincide with the truth that he said, "How are they ever going to do that if they don't have someone tell them?" Which means he's not only appointed the "ends," which is what he wants to accomplish, and that is someone at your office is still yet to be saved, that he's planning on saving, but he's also appointed the "means" by which that's going to happen, which is you and I being faithful to act in response to the instructions of Christ.

The acts of the apostles, the acts of the Christians in South County in the 21st century, we need to act on what he said. And he said, open your mouth and be my witnesses. He said have a conversation. And not only have I ordained and decreed what will happen in terms of the salvation of individuals in your neighborhood, but I've decreed that you should be the means by which that takes place. Both of those are true, and it's what J.I. Packer calls an antinomy. And by the way, that word you can get familiar with that word in the concept of these two truths in tension. You know, I could refer you to a book like the way Don Carson, one of his dissertations on divine sovereignty and human responsibility. And if you're up for that, great, tackle that.

But if you want a very simple book, I go back to J.I. Packer's little book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. It's listed on the back, biographical information on the back of your worksheet. We have it in our bookstore unless the last service sold out. You need to go and read this if you struggle with the theological excuse of "I don't feel the pressure, the urgency or the requirement to share the gospel because I know God is sovereign, he'll get it done." You need to see as much urgency as Peter felt when God said, "Go to Caesarea, open your mouth. There's someone there who is seeking you to share this message. Go." And he's going to go without hesitation, he's going to go because God says I've appointed the means by which people are going to get saved and that's you talking about the gospel.

So, again, I guess we could look at other layers, but I think that's the broadest one. And as a pastor, sometimes we have to sit there and say the theological problem for Peter was this.



Nobody in my congregation has that theological problem. But you have this theological problem and there may be others, but let's just deal with whatever it is. That's why I use the word "any" in this point. Ditch ANY theological excuse. It's like you saying, "I'm not going to pray because, you know, God's going to do whatever he's going to do. If my prayers aren't going to change, you know, the sovereign decrees of God, then why pray." And I'm going to say, because God told you to pray. And I've had people say to me, very educated people, "Why would I ever share the gospel with people if God's already decided this?" Or they've said it maybe in a more nuanced way, "Why would I call someone to repentance if they don't have the capability to repent?" Right? If you really want to get down to the levels of theology of total depravity.

I'm saying this: because God told you to, because God said to. God said to be persuasive, Second Corinthian Chapter 5, knowing the fear of God, which should be not acting on the instructions he gave us. Right? I persuade men. I want to persuade people. And that's going to be a hard thing to do because guess what? When you start talking about religion at work, when you start telling your friends, "Hey, let's go to the baseball game, but we're going to talk about things that are eternally important." You know, there's going to be a price tag attached to that. Probably won't be before the Supreme Court of your nation at threat of death, being told to never talk about the gospel again. Well, that may happen someday, but it's not happening right now. But you may lose a relationship. You may be ridiculed. If you have questions laid before you that you think I don't know how I'm going to answer that. I may look stupid, I may feel stupid, but it's not complicated. Start a conversation. "Hey, just in your assessment, where do you think you stand with the creator? Where do you think you stand with the God who made you? Do you think you're OK with him? 99% of people say, "Yeah, I think I'm fine with him." And I'll bet Cornelius probably thought that. And here a messenger was sent getting his theological problems out of the way saying, "No, no, no, my responsibility is to share that message."

Verse 16. This vision of this potpourri, this smorgasbord, that's a better word, of foods, it's not a suggestion, "Hey, do you see anything here you like to eat?" No, it's like "Eat it," right? And there's going to be a guy who you're not even supposed to be seen with, a Roman centurion, "Go and share the gospel, go into his home, talk to his family and share the message of the Jewish messiah." This is all assigned to him. And I got to think, when Peter is being so obstinate, "I am not going to eat that non-kosher food." Right? You got to think about the pattern of Peter throughout the gospels when we get to know him, how he's that kind of person. He's a very strong-willed person. And in this case, he thinks he's doing the right thing. Right? "I've never eaten anything common or unclean." And yet God saying, "No, you've got to do it. You've got to do it. You've got to do it."

And it's interesting, too, that it's three times. I'm not a numerologist, but I'm just telling you, that's kind of the pattern in Peter's life. Right? He's always being confronted with things thrice over. Like when he says, "Ah, everyone else can fall away. I will never fall away. If I have to die with you, I'm going to die with you." And here he is elevating his own sense of the value of his own resolve. "I'm so resolved. I'm so committed. I'm so loyal." And Christ had to say, "You know, you're going to deny me not once, not twice, you're going to deny me three times



before dawn, before the rooster crows you're going to deny me." And he does, starting with, as we learn in the gospels, with a common slave girl, a teenager likely in Caiaphas' courtyard as Jesus is arrested and being tried, Peter is there denying that he even knows Jesus.

And then the guys around the fire warming themselves by the charcoal fire. And all sudden now they're saying, "You're with him, you're from Galilee. I recognize your accent." Peter says, "I've never known him. He calls then curses on himself. And by the last time that he denies Christ, that third time to prove to himself, and God has to emphasize it three times over, this is not about the value of your resolve or commitment. You're not that great. You're not all that, Peter. I mean, that whole humbling process, after that was made crystal clear, Peter got it. And it says in the passage "he went out and wept bitterly."

Well, then you know what happens, he gets crucified and on the third day he rises from the dead, Jesus does, and then Peter's there, he's running in, looking in the tomb. We know all that. And you can read all about that in John Chapter 20. And then you think, OK, done. Time for the book of Acts. It's not time for the book of Acts, because if you know the story, Peter says, "I'm done, I'm going fishing." And he goes out fishing. And as he goes out fishing and in John Chapter 21, Jesus has to show up and he has to teleport into the Sea of Galilee there on the shore, he makes another fire. This time it's a fire of restoration, not a fire of denial. And he broils some fish on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. And Peter's out there fishing just like the first time Christ called him.

He couldn't catch anything. Christ says, "Put your nets on the other side." He calls them onshore. Peter recognizes him. He swims in and he sits down and he has a conversation and Jesus asks him three times, "Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?" Peter says, "I love you. Of course I love you. You know that I love you." They went through that three times. And you know what was attached to each of those is three recommissioning of your life. "Hey, I told you follow me and I'll make you fishers of men. And that means you're going to be a pastor, you're going to be a shepherd. You're going to feed the flock. You're going to seek the lost sheep. You're going to be my arms, my voice and my leader in this church." And Peter says, "No, I want to go fishing." So Jesus says, "Tend my sheep, feed my lambs, tend my sheep." Get back out there, leave the nets behind again three times over.

And I think about the obstinance here of Peter going, "No, I'm not going to eat that. I'm not going to eat that. I'm not going to eat that," which has to at some level reflect or we wouldn't need the illustration his real obstinance about being identified with Gentile people, as later he lapses back into that kind of hypocrisy that Paul has to call him out on in the book of Galatians. And my point is how patient God is to continually go after a guy who seems so hard-headed. And I just want to say that I think should resonate with us as you hear another sermon from your pastor, 50 sermons in the book of Acts saying to you one more time, "You ought to share the gospel. You ought to share the gospel. You ought to share the gospel. You should share the gospel." God has told you to be his witnesses in our generation. And if it's not for our witness in our generation, guess what? The next generation won't have the gospel,



humanly speaking. But guess what? God has ordained the human instrument, and that's you and me. We have to do this.

And so I would say this. We ought to stop and be grateful for God's patience. Number two, "Be Grateful for God's Patience." And by the way, whenever there's time and God just delays anything, whether it's judgment or whatever it might be, this is a sign, according to Second Peter Chapter 3 of his opportunity for salvation. In other words, the reason he didn't ditch Peter is because he wants him in this case to be a tool of the instrument and message of salvation.

Let's look at this in three ways. Number one, letter "A", if you will. When you were a non-Christian and God was seeking you, his voice was going out through the instrument of, as Romans 10 says, some human person talking to you about the need for Christ. I will bet even with preparation and the tilling of the soil of your heart that whatever... you probably didn't respond the first time you heard someone say, "You know what? You should call yourself a sinner and see yourself as you are and follow Christ and trust in him and seek his righteousness and rely on that instead of your own." I'll bet you didn't respond. Matter of fact, the people that studied this kind of stuff and I know it's kind of just a human analysis of it all. They said that the average person who makes a commitment to Christ and puts their trust in Christ, it's taken seven explanations, seven approaches, seven appeals of the gospel in their life before they do it.

So most people if they have a testimony they'll look back and say, "Man, it didn't get through my thick head initially." You got to be grateful for the grace that God showed in pursuing you when he pursued you. Now we introduce ourselves to Peter and it seems like he drops the net the first time that we see him. But read the gospels carefully, I think there was more to it than that. And I know certainly with Paul how many times that Paul hear the gospel that Jesus was the messiah and rejected it. And in Chapter 9, we see God being so patient with Paul and bringing him to faith in Christ, and he has to kick him off of his horse and saying, "You're kicking against the goads." How many times have you kicked against the goads? How many times did I prompt you to respond to Christ and see him for who he was? I don't know how many times, but, you know, it was a lot. It's kicking, kicking, plural, against the goads. You continually rebuffed this message.

And all of that, by the way, that obstinate, hard-headed kind of zeal saying, "I'm fine, I'm doing God's work, persecuting The Way, I'm doing what I should be doing." All of that, by the way, Paul says in First Timothy Chapter 1, he saved a hardheaded, obstinate person like me so that I could be a template, an example of "God's perfect patience." It's amazing how patient he is, how long-suffering he is. He saved me and I can see God's patience in my conversion story. And I'm just saying that is one way you need to look at this. And you need to look at it this way, that God is being patient with people at your work. God is being patient with people in your extended family. God has been very patient with people in your neighborhood. And he has probably had plenty of, your neighbor, plenty of exposures to the truth of the gospel, but hasn't yet responded and you're thinking, "Well, they've heard it."



OK, well, think of how patient God has been with you. I'm saying now you need to see how patient God is being with them. Speaking of Peter, Peter said think about how "patient God was in the days of Noah when the ark was being constructed." And the Bible says he was a preacher of righteousness. Apparently, he was up there saying things not only about the truth, but that truth would be calling them to repentance. And the only way to get out of the coming destruction of the world was to get on the ark. And there was plenty of space and he probably needed some help. And it was like, you should get on the ark. And he was so patient with that, giving so many opportunities. God is being patient with the non-Christians in your world. He's been patient with you in your conversion story.

Now, here's the real key I want to emphasize. And he's been really patient with you when he has clearly articulated to you repeatedly that you need to be talking to non-Christians about the gospel. How many times has he told you that? How many times has he used me to tell you that? How often have you heard the fact that you should be gutsy enough and it's a simple step, there are no big words in the sentence, right? "Where do you think you stand with God?" That's an easy sentence to say. It's simple. It's just difficult because you know there's a price tag. And I'm saying think about God being patient with you. I mean, he's trying to emphasize, if you feel like, "Pastor Mike, can't you get on to another theme in this book? Can't you find something in there that doesn't make me feel like I got to share the gospel to people? All I'm telling you is the repeated redundant repetition of the call for you to be his witnesses is a reminder of God's patience.

There was a Peter-esque kind of personality in the Old Testament, his name was Jonah. Remember Jonah? He was a little obstinate, wasn't he? God said, why don't you go to Assyria and why don't you tell them that I'm going to judge them. Now that's how it's introduced to us and therefore, people say, well, it's just a statement and a declaration of coming judgment. Well, it was. But here's what Jonah knew was involved in that, because he reveals it in Chapter 4 of Jonah, and that is this: "I knew that if I called them to repentance," now I'm elaborating, but here's the point of the passage in Jonah 4, "I knew you're merciful and gracious. If they would even listen to what I would have to say, you'd probably forgive them. And you know what? I don't much care for the Assyrians because they're the bad guys. So I don't want to go." And you know how hard-headed he was, right? He ran and went the other way, went off on the ship and he's like, "I'm heading to Tarsus. I'm done." And he gets on the boat and he goes, and God says, "Fine, I'll find another prophet, then I'll just kill you."

No, he goes after him, has him thrown in the ocean, says, "I'm going to give you a little ride you'll never forget. Put you in this big fish, you will taste for the stomach acids of the big creatures I created. It's going to hurt your eyes, is going to peel all the hair off your body, it's going to bleach your skin, going to be really bad and then you're going to be a chunk in his vomit. And I'll put you up." I'm sorry, but that's what it was. Throw you up on the shores and I'm going to, here are my favorite verses in Jonah for me. Jonah Chapter 3, verses 1 and 2. And here's how it starts. "The word of the Lord came a second time to Jonah." God said, "Now, I told you to go to Assyria, and I'm not giving up on you. I'd like you to go. Let me tell you again. Can you go to Nineveh?" And Jonah goes. Now he's a little obstinate, even within



his own heart, but he goes and you might be a little obstinate hearing a sermon like this, "I don't want to talk about this."

Hey, listen, take the step. I don't care if you're gritting your teeth while you take a step. Take a step, take a step into a conversation about Christ. And know this, that because he didn't just say, I'm done with you, then I guess I'll bring you home because you're not going to share the gospel and get you up here to worship and know the Bible better. You can be like me. You have the mind of Christ this afternoon. He's keeping you here. You're here again. Even though you haven't shared the gospel all month. I'm just telling you this. You're here and God is telling you one more time, "I've been very patient with you. And I'm now going to ask you again, be my witness. Get over whatever theological excuse you have and see how patient I am, not only with you as an evangelist, but with the people in your sphere of influence who are still breathing the air that I've created. They are being called in my patience to salvation."

"God is not slow in keeping his promises as some count slowness, but he's patient toward you," speaking of you in general of this generation of people, "not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance." Well, then he better get them. You better send his voice out. Well, he's going to use your vocal cords to get the message out. He's ordained the "end" and the "means" and he's been very patient about the fact that perhaps we have been fighting it. Let the word of the Lord come to you a second time, if you will, to remind you of your message and your role to share the gospel with people. Don't test God's patience. That's not a good thing.

Verse 17 Acts Chapter 10. "Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men sent by Cornelius made inquiry as to Simon's house, they stood at the gate, they called out to ask whether Simon the apostle here, Peter." He's here. "Peter was pondering this and the Spirit said," Hey, go downstairs. "Behold, there are three men looking for you. Rise and go and accompany them," now underscore this, "without hesitation." Do it without hesitation. I don't want you to hesitate. "Yeah, but I was waiting for lunch. They were preparing lunch, so I cannot eat lunch?" "No, go. Get lunch at the gas station. Just go. I need you to go." And of course we learn in the next verse, right? I mean, first three words of verse 21, "And Peter went." He went. He went downstairs and he went. Even though this was hard for him, he went, he took the step, he did it and he did it without hesitation.

Now, this is wonderful because here were the non-Christians. They were the emissaries who were sent from Cornelius, but here they were. I'm sure there was plenty of conversation that happened between Joppa and Caesarea. I mean, here were the non-Christians. They were standing at the gate. They were right in front of his face. And all I'm saying is that God had orchestrated all of this so that people might seek him and know God, and the whole point was you now are the messenger of this. And it's a, let's put it this way, an ordained opportunity. The door was open and it was an opportunity for him to speak up about the gospel. And you ought to be looking for those, even though they're not far from being right in front of your nose.



Number three, you need to "Look for Ordained Opportunities." There are ordained opportunities and they're standing at the gate. They're right there. They're everywhere. In church I'm hoping it's not a target rich environment because I hope there's a lot of Christians surrounding you and you go out on the donut table, stand around, there are mostly Christians here. Great. But I'll bet wherever you're going tomorrow, here's all you need: you, a Christian, and a non-Christian. That's all you need. And to be able to say, "OK, my job is to be a witness to Christ, I need to say, 'I don't care how good you feel before God. It doesn't matter if you think you're better, you need to trust in Christ. You need to see your sin for what it is and trust exclusively in Christ'" That's the message. And it may spark all kinds of problems. And I'm saying if they don't want to hear it, the pattern of Scripture, it's fine. "Doesn't mean I'm going to shut up with other people. But if you don't want to hear it, I'm not going to... Great. I didn't know." Why everybody's been talking about... Great. I'm just here to be faithful to do what I'm supposed to do.

I'm not controlling how many ripples come from my jump off the cliff. I'm not even controlling the effect of what other people think of the form of my jump. I'm just going to jump into the conversation. That's what God has asked us to do. All you need do is look for opportunities. And again, I emphasize it when I read it, but, he was waiting for lunch, it was being made and the point here is without hesitation. I mean, that's how this is described even in Chapter 11. Yeah, look at Chapter 11 verse 11, as he recounts this. "And behold" which again is language we don't use much, but there it was, look, "at the very moment," he was thinking about all this, "the men arrived in the house, which were sent to me. And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction." And off he goes. This is like bam, bam, bam, bam, bam.

And so I'm saying, here's our responsibility. All you need to make this sermon work is to find a non-Christian. And all I'm telling you, they'll be right in front of your nose. They'll be everywhere this week unless you live in a cave or are a monk and heading back to the monastery or listening on the stream in a bunker somewhere. Right? You are going to interact with non-Christians this week. And all it takes is a conversation to get the ball rolling. God has asked you to do it, and I'm asking you to do it.

He's been patient with you. He's been patient with them. He was patient with you in your conversion story. And it will disrupt your schedule, you may have to call, "Honey, I'm going be late for dinner tonight because I'm engaged in a gospel conversation." Great. Blame it on me. Right? I'll pay for your dinner. You can go out and if I ruin dinner, I'll fix it. But here's the thing. I don't know. That could get expensive (audience laughs) but hopefully it'll be a small number of you. But here's the thing. I think of Paul, Paul in First Corinthians 16, he had all kinds of travel plans. "Here are my plans." And he said, "I had to change them." Why? Because a door of opportunity was open. He says, "A wide door for effective ministry was open to me." I had an opportunity. And in this town, I had people who were willing to listen to me about the gospel, so I stayed there. "Many adversaries," but I stayed there.

So be ready for God to disrupt your plans. And I don't want you to imagine the perfect gospel conversation. I want you to imagine all you need is this, here's the equation. You, a Christian and someone who's not a Christian, that's all the equation you need. Not "it would be great if



there were like somebody just came to me, like in Chapter 8, where they said, 'I'm reading the Bible and I just need to understand it.'" Don't wait for that, with anyone. Jesus was criticized often because he was trying to reach people who people thought you shouldn't be talking to them. And he said, well, you know, "It's the sick that need a physician." It's not that everyone wasn't sick, is that only certain people realize they are.

There's a story, a gal was talking about this. She was in line at the mall or some shopping area, and there was this person next to her in line and the line was going slow and that person was very harden looking is the way she described her. I won't go into the details, but it was like, ah, a person has like a rough life, mean. I'm sure it wasn't going... I don't know why, but God had impressed this gal like, "you ought to talk about Christ." And so she brought up the gospel. She said to this gal thinking that she's going to hear this. Right? I mean, everyone who would see the situation would say she'd respond, "I don't want your God, don't cram your religion down my throat." And when she brought up the gospel and Christ and where she stood with God, here was a response. "I don't know why God would want me." Right? I mean, just think about that. The prep that has gone into God cultivating the heart, just starting to sound a lot like the book of Luke where the tax collector couldn't even look up to God. Like, "Why would God even answer my prayers?" Here was a gal who was ready, even though the external container of this gal looked like she was going to be hostile toward anything that was truthful.

And all I'm telling you, don't look for the perfect situation. Know that we are indiscriminately sharing the gospel, just like the New Testament church was indiscriminately sharing with anyone and everyone. Look for those specific opportunities, no matter what they are, allow them to disrupt your plans. Engage in the conversation. It's easy for us here to talk about Christ on the patio, talk about the gospel in our songs and our lyrics to, you know, listen to your preacher talk about the gospel in these air-conditioned rooms with padded seats it's easy for us to have all this conversation.

We are proclaiming the truth of the gospel all the time. It's harder out there, and I just want you to know the harder is not complicated, it's just you in that reluctant internal debate you're having, we got to get through all that. And one of the ways that God wants us to be motivated clearly is by something Paul said in First Corinthians to the Corinthian church when you guys take the Lord's Supper, two things that make this a reality. One is you need to realize you are proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes. Why? Is this being televised, you know, to non-Christians? No. But in this church, we are proclaiming the Lord's death by saying, here's the bread and here's the cup, and these things represent the body of Christ. He died. That's why the blood is an issue here. This is the blood of the promise of the new covenant. All of this in these elements reminds us that Christ died for our sins.

And now here's the other layer. Now, when you take this, examine yourself, judge yourself, literally, it says in that passage, judge yourself. So I'm supposed to think about my sin and think about my guilt. And there's not a time you take the Lord's Supper, if you do it right, where you're not contemplating your own failures and your own sin and your own transgression and praying and thinking, "Oh, here's the answer. Christ was crushed for my



iniquities. God was able to punish him instead of me. And here is the gospel, my sin and the amazing transaction that if I confess my sins, this payment takes my sins away." That proclamation of the efficacious, if you will, power of Christ's death, we're proclaiming that just by taking these elements. And all I'm telling you, let that motivate you. Because all I want you to do is do the same thing we're doing here, do it outside the walls. Get beyond this group in this building and this piece of property and speak up for Christ.

So let's do that now, let's have the ushers come forward. They're going to hand out these two elements. If you're a Christian and you're trusting in the finished work of Christ, I want to take a piece of bread, I want you to take the cup. I want you to hang on to them and do exactly what the Scripture says. First Corinthians 11 says, "examine yourself." It says, "judge yourself." Think through your own life and confess your sins. Then think I get the imputed righteousness of Christ and I get all my sin absorbed on the cross because of a broken body and spilled blood of the perfect Son of Man. And you pray and then as an act of unity, which I think is very important, you're only supposed to take the Lord's Supper when you come together as a church. That's why you don't do it in your house. We do it together.

We'll take these elements at the same time. We'll synchronize our taking of it, which I guess is just another expression of our unity. Not that the Bible says we have to do it at the exact same time. But, I would invite you to hold onto those elements, to examine your heart, to pray and to think about the gospel transaction of Christ dying for your sin. Then thinking, that's all I got to do is take this feeling and this message and this rationale, this equation and just talk about it outside these walls. That's why we're supposed to be evangelical Christians, sharing the good news, the "Euaggelion," the good message of God that we can be forgiven. So you spend time with God and in three and a half minutes I'll get back up here and we will take these elements together.

I know precisely what you and I are supposed to do when we ingest these elements. Because of the same passage, of course, I know what's supposed to surround it. I'm supposed to examine myself. I'm supposed to have a sense of what Christ did for me, this body and blood of Christ. I have to trust in that. But specifically in that passage in First Corinthians Chapter 11, because in verse 24 where he gives us this phrase, he says, when you eat this bread and drink this cup two verses later, he says, "Do this in remembrance of me." And that's not just a general statement, obviously, in the context. It's about a body that was killed by God through the hands of Roman soldiers, blood that was spilled from that body, the death that our sins deserve.

It reminds me of the king of Denmark saying to Hamlet, "Remember me." Just two words, and of course, they meant way more than just, hey, recall me when, you know, this was huge. It was like there is a whole story behind this. Maybe you grew up in a church where you had the table up there and they would stack the trays and all that. And it had that inscription on the front, you know, "Do this in remembrance of me." That's a loaded phrase. I am supposed to remember everything about this transaction, which is basically the gospel. Right? That I am a sinner who should be just cast out of God's presence, but instead I'm going to be forgiven. My sin is going to be remembered no more before God. It is separated from me as far as the east



is from the west. That is an amazing thing. And that's what we're proclaiming when we do this.

But our activity is our brain is remembering all of that. That kind of tactile experience of ingesting these elements and saying my identification is with that Christ who suffered for me, all we're saying in a message like this is just that's the message you get outside the walls. You share the message, this experience, this feeling, the sense of remembering Christ. That's where your non-Christian friends who have never thought that way, they need to think that way. And "How are they going to ever hear," so that they will believe so that they will be saved, "if someone does not preach to them?" And that word is that I'm proclaiming the message.

So may God use our time of declaring and proclaiming the Lord's death in our act of the Lord's Supper to be a catalyst for that kind of conversation this week. So with your mind engaged in the right place, remembering what Christ did for us, let's eat this bread and drink this cup in remembrance of Christ.

God, as we experience even the taste of the bread and the cup we want to remember our complete need, our dependence upon you wrapping us in the righteous activity, the righteous life of Christ, that we would be seen as righteous. But we know we are sinners and we remember that every time we are forced in times like this to consider our sin and to think about the judgment we deserve and to judge and evaluate ourselves and to examine who we are. And we know that we need grace. And what a distance that is from people we rub shoulders with all week long who don't even think they need any of this, they think what they need they've got, they think what they believe is enough. They think what they do is good enough because it's better than someone else. God, let us engage in the conversation that will lead to our attempts at persuasion, which is exactly what you've asked us to do. "Knowing the fear of God we persuade men."

I pray we would do that not just out of a sense of duty, because we want to do the acts of our generation of evangelists, but because we really want, we care, we are like Christ seeing people who are sheep without a shepherd. They're not of the flock. They're not in the fold. They're not adopted into his family and we want to extend that family, the borders in the pen, if you will, of that boundary of more people who are following Christ. So God, open up our mouths this week that we respond to this sermon and this proclamation of the death of Christ.

In Jesus name. Amen.