

A Heart Prepared for Missionaries

Acts 10 – Evening Service – March 21, 2010

Acts 9:43

I Peter 3:15

John 9:25, 30-34

➤ A God-Seeking _____ (Acts 10)

His Spiritual Passion:

“devout” = pious, godly, devout

1. Devout in his interest in _____

The Point: He had a strong spiritual hunger

2. Devout with a commendable _____

“one who feared God”

3. Devout that had an influence on his _____

4. Devout even with his _____

5. Devout in his _____

Romans 1:19-20

➤ Hearts Prepared for _____

There are still unsaved people _____

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Intro: Missions work is similar to farming in that the heart of man is like soil. Soil needs preparation before seeding. Ambassadors of Christ have several things we need in order to till the soil of men's hearts

- ✓ Prayer is vital!
- ✓ An interest in the souls of people outside our comfort zone (a heart of a missionary had to change before the heart of one seeking a missionary would be received).

Acts 9:43

And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon.

Why is this significant?

- This man's job involved the handling of bodies of dead animals
 - Leviticus 11:35-40 - Levitical law said that these people were "unclean"
 - This person was necessary in a community ... but he would seldom have Orthodox Jew visitors in his home because of his ceremonial uncleanness.
 - So here's what's significant. This man has come to Christ ... and Peter doesn't treat him like he would have in the past.
 - God is moving Peter a step at a time from Jewish legalism into Christian freedom ... and an interest in people who have been outside his comfort zone.
- ✓ The ability of the evangelist to share the gospel – therefore knowledge of the gospel is crucial for the missionary before the mission-field can be harvested

I Peter 3:15

but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence

Ambassadors need to be prepared ...

But it's intimidating to some Christians because they are young believers. Rather than lay guilt on young Christians ... let's look at the following:

Transition: It is this pastor's desire and the leaders as well ... that everyone in the church be trained in evangelism. It is a step by step process ... and let's back the process up to what has been entitled ...

A Model of the Great Commission Process

- 5 – Has no knowledge, no belief or no interest in spiritual matters
- 4 – Believes in a Supreme Being, but has no knowledge of the Gospel. He may be committed to another belief system
- 3 – Some knowledge of the Gospel, mixed with some misunderstandings
- 2 – Has a factual knowledge of the Gospel: curious, undecided
- 1 – Understands Gospel and its implications and is positively considering following Christ

CONVERSION/SALVATION/NEW BIRTH

- +1 – New Christian, “babe” in Christ
- +2 – Assimilated into church, basic knowledge of Christian life
- +3 – Studying the Bible, active in church, growing
- +4 – Spiritually strong, serving in church, witnessing
- +5 – Spirit leader, trainer of others

Everyone present on Sunday falls somewhere on this chart.
The goal of the church is to help people move up the scale.

CONVERSION/SALVATION/NEW BIRTH ... The bar in the middle ... represents the most significant transition. This is the point at which an individual passes from death to life and from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. But there is usually a lot of work involved to get someone from a -5 or -4 to Christ. It is unlikely that a person will make a decision to follow Christ through a single conversation or by hearing a single sermon. And at the same time ... when a person comes to Christ – when they trust in Christ for salvation – they have begun a journey toward spiritual maturity and effective service. We have a responsibility to aid them in that journey.

THE BIG QUESTION: *WHERE ARE YOU ON THIS CHART?*

Here’s some great news!

You can be in the +1 stage

+1 – New Christian, “babe” in Christ

And be involved in evangelism!!! You do not need to be a spiritual leader and trainer of others to share the gospel!

Compare: One of my favorite stories in the gospels is Jesus restoring the sight of a blind man ... a man who regained his sight when Jesus wasn’t present. The religious leaders tried to discredit the miracle ... but a brand new believer gave the gospel as clear as anyone though only hours old in the faith

John 9:25, 30-34

He therefore answered, "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

9:30 ... "Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes.

9:31 "We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him.

9:32 "Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.

9:33 "If this man were not from God, He could do nothing."

9:34 They answered and said to him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" And they put him out.

Transition: A miracle got this blind man thinking about who Jesus was. And that led ultimately to his salvation.

BUT IN ACTS 10 ... we see a completely different way in which someone came to salvation.

Chapter 10 is the story of God reaching out to the entire Gentile world.

- ✓ It would start through the internal passion of a Roman Soldier.
- ✓ There is an intense hatred between the Jews and the Gentiles in the first century.
- ✓ The Jews believed that God wanted them to maintain this hatred.
- ✓ The Jews considered themselves very spiritual if they maintained that hatred and that distance from the "goyim" - Gentiles.

But disdain and hatred was never God's idea. He wanted the Jews to stay distinct from the idolatry of the Gentiles. He never, however, planned to exclude them from the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

The story of Cornelius and chapter 10 marks the important change in the affairs of the Christian Jews and Gentiles.

In chapter 10 we meet someone every missionary would love to meet ... someone who was waiting for someone to explain the gospel to him. Here is someone chomping at the bit to be right with God and born-again. And what is strange is this ... this man is ...

➤ **A God-Seeking UNBELIEVER** (Acts 10:1)

Acts 10:1-8

Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort,

10:2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.

10:3 About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, "Cornelius!"

10:4 And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.

10:5 "Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter;

10:6 he is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea."

10:7 When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants,

10:8 and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

His Occupation:

A Roman soldier - a commander of 100 men ... a career officer

His Religious Background:

Their predominant worship was that of their RULERS. Cornelius undoubtedly observed the religion of his own country and realized that it was empty and worthless!

Transition: His leadership as a soldier is quite commendable ... as we see in the rest of the story ... but his confidence in the religion of Rome has undoubtedly collapsed. This will drive him to seek truth elsewhere.

His Spiritual Passion: Much like the Ethiopian Eunuch ... Cornelius was seeking

to know the true God ... but still unclear as to how to reach Him

A theological challenge

Romans 3:11-12

There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God;
3:12 All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one."

But here we see someone seeking for God. So that tells us that God works in some people's hearts differently than others. And it is acceptable to appeal to people to be this kind of person. As well, we shouldn't be surprised when we come on someone like this.

Look at what the Bible says about him.

Acts 10:2

A devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.

"devout" = pious, godly, devout

1. Devout in his interest in **TRUTH**

The Point: He had a strong spiritual hunger

2. Devout with a commendable **FEAR**

"one who feared God"

3. Devout that had an influence on his **FAMILY**

(10:2) "... feared God with all his household"

* Cornelius was consistent in his beliefs ... His family saw his sincerity and followed his example

* The man was genuine ... it was visible to his family ...

4. Devout even with his **POCKETBOOK**

"... gave many alms to the Jewish people"

* A person who has a true relationship and love for God **WILL** display it through his giving to the Lord's work ... and to the need!

5. Devout in his **PRAYERS**

The Need For More Complete Knowledge:

1. Pursuit of truth doesn't save
2. Fear of God doesn't save

3. Giving to the poor doesn't save
 4. Praying to God doesn't save
- NONE OF THESE THINGS MERIT SALVATION ... **BUT** THEY ARE THINGS THAT GOD NOTES ... and commends ... and must actually be initiating in individuals

*** **But ...** Cornelius was responding properly to the little knowledge he had
The PRE-WORK of SALVATION

The Age Old Question:

"What about the poor pagan, that 'good' heathen, who wants to know God but never had a chance? Is he lost?"

The Answer: I believe God will reveal more light to these people ... but salvation can still only come to those who receive the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ alone!

Cornelius' spiritual condition:

He knew God as a **CREATOR** but not as a **SAVIOR**

Transition: Cornelius is a bona fide truth seeker ... and so God responds by giving Cornelius more knowledge of Himself. But the Lord will also open the opportunity of salvation to the entire Gentile world by starting with Cornelius! For now we note ...

The Vision: An angel gives a message

10:3

"... your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God"

What God Observed:

His desire for a relationship with the true God was **GENUINE**

Definition of a Truth Seeker: Romans 1:19-20

Romans 1:19-20

"... that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

This pastor's perspective

A HEART IS PREPARED FOR THE GOSPEL IN THE HEARTS OF SOME PEOPLE FROM Romans 1:19-20

People reveal they are responding properly to Romans 1:19-20 when ...

1. They acknowledge there is a supreme being behind **CREATION**

Illustrations:

- A. The Watch maker ...
- B. Our intricate human body

2. They desire to **KNOW** this Supreme Being

An Interesting Question:

Was Cornelius a Christian by virtue of his desire to know God?

No! It would take more knowledge for Cornelius to be saved ...

*** Observe the offer to those who seek and ask ... (Rom. 10:13-14)

Rom. 10:13-14

"for whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved."
How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

Observe The Salvation Process:

1. Salvation comes to those who **CALL OUT** to God

Rom. 10:13

"For whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

2. Salvation requires the proper **INFORMATION** about Christ

"... and how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard?"

3. Salvation will not come without a **PREACHER**

"... and how they shall hear without a preacher"

*** Observe ... God would arouse an even greater spiritual appetite for Cornelius ... because the angel would not tell him about Jesus Christ ... It would have to come via a human ...

Thoughts About Seeking the Lord:

Isaiah 55:6-7

"Seek the Lord while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.
Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the Lord, And He will have compassion on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon."

*** Instructions to Solomon:**

I Chronicles 28:9

"As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands

every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever."

➤ Hearts Prepared for MISSIONARIES

- There are still unsaved people SEEKING GOD

Cornelius is not an isolated case – the only person in history to be seeking God

God views this kind of search as GENUINE

And God even commends it!

The prayers offered by these people in essence is a prayer that God would PROVIDE more information about Himself

The Spirit of God is placing this INTEREST in the heart of truth-seekers, and there are truth-seekers waiting for truth-givers (evangelists) so they can receive salvation.