



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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### The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 10:1-23

Acts

"Elect from Every Nation"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We're back in the book of Acts this morning and we're in Acts chapter 10. And if you'll remember, Peter left Jerusalem and he visited the surrounding areas and strengthened the churches, the newly formed churches in that area, and Luke records particularly his journey from Jerusalem southwest into the coastal plain. He went to Lydda, where he healed Aeneas, who had been paralyzed for many years, and then he went to Joppa, which is on the Mediterranean coast, and there he raised Tabitha from the dead.

Well, chapter 10 opens some miles up the Mediterranean coast, and we read in verse 1, "Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, 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. 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!' 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. Now dispatch some mention to Jopps and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter; he is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea.' 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 attendant, and after he had explained to them, he sent them to Joppa.

"On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. A voice came to him, 'Get up, Peter, kill and eat!' But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.' Again a voice came to him a second time, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.' This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.

"Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon's house, appeared at the gate; and calling out, they were asking whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was staying there. While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are looking for you. But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself.' Peter went down to the men and said, 'Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?' They said, 'Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you.' So he invited them in and gave them lodging."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word in our time studied together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for the great privilege it is to be together this morning, this Sunday morning, when we can, as men and women who profess faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and our Savior, sit together and open Your word and read out loud. That is a great privilege, a great blessing, because this is Your inherent word

and You have gifted us with the possession of it. And not only that, but now, Father, we can spend some time considering the meaning of this text, and as we do that, we pray that You would bless us with understanding.

Every believer in Jesus Christ has been sealed with the Holy Spirit. He dwells within our hearts. That is a blessing beyond comprehension, to have the third person of the Trinity literally dwelling within us, giving us guidance, opening our minds, directing our thoughts to understand Your inherent word and make the proper application of it to our lives. And we seek that from You, Father. We pray that You would give us understanding and make the applications to us.

We are many different individuals. We have different experiences in life. Our circumstances are, in many cases, unique to each one of us. And yet this single text, which we've all considered together, has various applications to our lives, and so we pray that the Spirit of God would make those applications to us individually.

And through it all, may we all come to see the greatness of grace, which we have received from You, and rejoice in that. So teach us, Father, and build us up in the faith. Bless us spiritually and bless us physically and materially as well. You have made us both spiritual and physical beings, and so we are tied to the physical. We are dependent upon the physical world that surrounds us, and You made it that way. And so we have our physical needs, but You are the one who supplies them all. We are dependent creatures and You meet our needs, and we confess, Father, that You do so faithfully, so frequently, that we take Your blessings for granted so often. Everything we have, Lord, we know is a gift from You. This is not a natural system that we live in, not a naturalistic system. It is a system upheld by, sustained by You. And so every good and perfect gift comes down from above. We thank You for that.

And sometimes, Father, You must deprive us of some of those things in order for us to understand our dependence upon You. You

deprive us of our health at times, and You have done that with many of Your saints. In fact, the day will come when all of us will lose that health.

And we pray for those who have sought our prayers. You know all of our needs. We pray that You would bless, bless greatly. We pray for our meetings this evening and we pray that as we meet with those who have just come to Believer's Chapel and seek to know more about the ministry here, that You bless us as we seek to answer questions, and educate them in the ministry in this place as we gather for the meeting of the church and celebrate the Lord's supper that You'd bless that meeting. Bless those who participate. Bless all of us, that we be built up in the faith as we remember our Lord, as we take the supper, as we think of His death for us and remember that we do it until He comes, and He will come again. What a glorious day that will be.

May we live for that, Father, and may we not live for this present time, but may we live for the future, for the blessings that are eternal, we pray. Well, may our time together in the study of Your word. Bless us to that end. We pray these things in Christ name. Amen.

[Message] I like singing those old hymns, hymns by Augustus Toplady, the Wesleys, because the words are good. The theology's good. Of course, to appreciate them, you have to pay attention to what you're singing. I'll give you an example. We often sing The Church's One Foundation, and its second line, "Elect from every nation/Yet one o'er all the earth." But do we consider what a great truth that is? That in this world, with all its divisions, its national borders, its political and ethic and religious differences, people from every nation, every tribe and tongue and people and nation, are one in the church, one in Christ. We are a real family. That's a work of God's grace. The world can't do that, for all of its confident, pietistic talk about the brotherhood of man. It can't bring the nations together in a brotherhood, in a unity.

The divisions, the distrust, the hatred, runs too deeply. But in Christ God overcomes all of that, and He first did that with one of the oldest and broadest divisions in the human race, that between the Jew and the Gentile. It is an ancient rivalry that was very bitter in the early years of the church. The Gentiles were anti-Semitic, in part because they believed the Jews were anti-social. They thought circumcision was barbaric, and the Jewish customs of diet and cleanness strange.

A Greek described their separate way of life as inhospitable and anti-human. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote that the Jewish religion was tasteless and mean. There was a lot of anti-Jewish feeling and propaganda in the 1st century. In fact, sometimes it broke out in violence. You get a sense of the Gentiles' contempt for the Jews when, at the Lord's trial, Pilate said to Jesus, "I'm not a Jew, am i?"

And the Jews had nothing but contempt for the Gentiles. Pagan religions and morals were an abomination to them. They called Gentiles dogs. And no orthodox Jew would enter a Gentile's home or invite one into his home, or eat with a Gentile. When a Jew would return home to Israel after traveling in foreign lands, he would characteristically shake off the Gentile dust from his feet, because he considered it defiling.

Alfred Edersheim quotes one Jewish teacher as saying, "The best among the Gentile kill; the best among serpents crush its head." So there was a deep gulf between the two groups. They were separated by fear and suspicion. But from the earliest prophecy given to Abraham, in Genesis 12, God promised salvation to the Gentiles. "In you," He said, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." And Gentiles were saved in the Old Testament. We don't see a lot of that, but we do find Gentiles saved in the Old Testament. There was Rahab the harlot, who was a Canaanite. She was saved. There was Ruth, the Moabitiss. She was saved. In fact, both of those women are found in our Lord's genealogy.

But they weren't saved as Gentiles. They had to become Jews first. Jesus alluded to that in John 4 when He told the Samaritan woman that salvation is from the Jews. Gentiles entered salvation through Israel. They also told her that an hour was coming when that would change, when people would worship in spirit and truth, when the old order, the old covenant would end. Instead of Jerusalem and a temple, it would be Christ. Instead of the Law of Moses and the priesthood of Aaron, it would be Christ. And the way to Christ would be freely open to the Gentiles.

Acts 10 records when that hour was realized, when God opened the door of salvation to the Gentiles and saved them as Gentiles without them first passing through the narrow door of Judaism. He made these two hostile groups into one people, into one family. What Paul will call in Ephesians 2:15, "One new man." That's the miracle of God's grace. What human effort and human institutions cannot do, never will do. The world is a broken place. It is a divided place and the world will never put itself back together again. But what the world cannot do, God does when He makes enemies into friends by bringing them together in Christ.

Our text is about the initial events that brought this about, that led to Peter entering the home of a Gentile and preaching the gospel. It is a chapter about the salvation of the Gentiles and about the breadth, the width, the expanse of God's grace and salvation. It is worldwide. Jesus Christ is, as those Samaritans said in John 4, the Savior of the world. But by implication, this chapter not only teaches that, but it also teaches that nothing is too difficult for God. What is impossible for man is possible for God. And if He can close the gap between Jews and Gentiles, then He can fix any division in your life, whether it's one between husband and wife, or between parent or child, or it's a deep divide at work, He can fix that. God reconciles enemies.

The chapter opens in Caesarea, an important city located on the Mediterranean coast. It was built by Herod the Great and it was named

after Caesar Augustus. It had a great harbor and magnificent buildings. It was the administrative capital of Judea, where the Roman governors lived. And for the governors' protection, a Roman garrison was posted there.

One of the soldiers in Caesarea was Cornelius, a Centurion, we're told, in the Italian cohort. The Romans organized their army in legions, which had about 6,000 men. Every legion had about that number, and within the legion, there were cohorts, and a cohort was about a tenth of a legion. So around 600 men in a cohort, and a centurion had command over 100 men. He was the equivalent to a captain in today's army. The Roman historian Polybius spoke very highly of centurions. They weren't adventurous, he said, but good leaders, steady men who held their ground when overwhelmed and were ready to die at their posts.

The Bible also represents them favorably. There are four centurions mentioned in the New Testament, and all are seen in a good light. Cornelius was one of them. He was a man with authority and a remarkable man, not because of his military achievements. He may have been that, but we don't have any records of his achievements on the battlefield. He was a remarkable man because of his character. We read about that in verse 2. He is called "a devout man and one who feared God with all his household."

Now that probably means that he was a God-fearer, which is a technical term for a convert to Judaism who had not undergone circumcision. It was a difficult thing for the Gentiles to accept, and so many of them would not quite convert. They would become proselytes. They would join the Jewish people, but they would not complete that conversion with circumcision. There were many God-fearers among the Gentiles. They were attracted to the monotheism of Judaism and its high moral standards. They attended synagogue. Some became well versed in the prayers and the scripture lessons of the Jews. And they observed the Sabbath and they kept the dietary laws by abstaining from certain kinds of food.

Cornelius was a man like that. He gave many alms to the Jewish people, Luke says. And he prayed to God continually. As a Roman boy, he had probably prayed to Jupiter and Mars and Venus. He may have worshipped Caesar Augustus, but none of these gods had done anything for him. But when he arrived at his post in Judea, he was exposed to the light of Judaism and he responded to it. He began to pray to the Jewish God and support the local synagogue. He was not saved. He had not yet learned of the Savior, but he was one of God's elect and God's hand was upon him, arranging the circumstances of his life. He had brought him to that part of the world, given him a longing that had not been satisfied by the gods of Rome. And it created in his heart an interest for the light that he had received.

All of this was prevenient grace. That's a theological term. That means the grace that precedes conversion. That leads to conversion. And set Cornelius to seeking God. Now, no one can do that, apart from a work of God's grace. Our Lord made that very plain in John 6:44, "No one can come to Me," - no one can come to Me - "unless the Father draws him." But still people must seek the Lord. We are responsible to seek the Lord. The scriptures make that very plain. Isaiah said, "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near."

And Cornelius is an example of a man who did that. By the grace of God, he was seeking God. And we read in verse 3 that he had a vision. It was around the ninth hour, or 3:00 in the afternoon, that an angel spoke to him and said, 'Cornelius.' The encounter struck him with fear, but in verse 4, he answered, "What is it, Lord?" And the angel told him to dispatch some men to Joppa and send for Peter, who is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea.

Now we might wonder why the angel didn't simply take care of the matter himself and speak the gospel to Cornelius. He certainly knew the gospel and he could do it more eloquently than any man could speak the gospel. So why didn't the angel simply give the gospel and spare the men the journey down to Joppa and all that would take



place? Well, in part, the reason is, because giving the gospel is the privilege that God has given to men and women. That's our privilege.

But also it was necessary that an apostle be present, because this would be a significant event in the church. This would be a turning point in the history of the church, and it was important that the apostle who was present be the apostle Peter. He was the apostle to the circumcision. He was the apostle to the Jews, and that would add authority to receiving Gentiles into the church as equals.

Now, when the angel left, Cornelius summoned two of his servants and a soldier, who was one of his personal attendants, explained everything to them, and then he sent them to speak to Peter. As they traveled the 30 miles down the coast to Joppa, they might have wondered if Peter would speak to them. Would he receive a Gentile into the house? Peter was a Christian who had traveled a great distance in his thinking. He had received Samaritans into the church, having witnessed the revival that had taken place up in Samaria. He was staying in the home of Simon the tanner, a man who would have been ostracized by orthodox Jews because of his trade, which considered to be unclean.

But Simon was a Christian and Peter received him as a brother and stayed with him, because God had enlightened Peter's mind and he had broken down, removed the bias from his heart. But still, Peter was a Jewish man who thought like a Jewish man, who observed the Law of Moses and was very strict in his behavior. Receiving Gentiles and entering into Gentiles' homes was unorthodox. He'd not done that. He had not preached to Gentiles and freely offered salvation in Christ to the uncircumcised.

And so to prepare Peter to do that, God now gives him a vision that would teach him that regardless of what the Jews think or the Jews do, God no longer called Gentiles unclean. It happened the day after Cornelius' visit, as his messengers were approaching Joppa. Peter went up on the housetop to pray. Homes in the Middle East were traditionally built with flat roofs that were designed for activity, and

Peter went up on the roof for his daily quiet time. It was around noon, and while Peter was praying, we read that he became hungry. He probably called down for some food, and while it was being prepared, he had a vision.

Maybe it happened as he sat on the roof looking out across the Mediterranean and his eyes followed a ship on the western horizon. And as he watched it, the sail of that ship assumed the form of a sheet. It came down out of heaven and it was filled with strange animals. Verse 12 describes them as "all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air."

So he saw what Jews considered clean and unclean animals - some sheep and dove and other animals like that; maybe an ox was there, as well as lizards and pigs; maybe some scavengers, like an buzzard or an owl - a mix of all kinds of animals. The sight itself was bizarre enough, but when he heard a voice out of heaven say, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat," the whole experience became revolting. I'm sure Peter began to lose his appetite at that point. Kill and eat a pig. Peter wasn't about to do that. It was contrary to the diet God had given in the Law of Moses, where He had distinguished between animals and designated which ones were fit for food and which ones were not; which ones were considered clean and which ones were considered unclean. The Law was very clear.

It was a system, a law, a pattern set out. An animal with cloven hooves that chewed the cud like a cow, that was clean. That could be food. One that had cloven hooves and didn't chew the cud, like a pig, was unclean. It was forbidden. And the Law was very strict and strong on this point. Leviticus 20:25, "You shall not make yourselves detestable by animal or by bird or by anything that creeps on the ground, which I have separated for you as unclean."

Now, all of this, these laws of that kind, were given to instruct Israel to be holy. That's what this elaborate diet did. It was an object lesson in purity. It was designed to teach the people to be separate from what is spiritually unclean. And so to do that, God designated

certain animals clean and others unclean to illustrate that point, to remind the people in every aspect of their life, whether it was in the clothing they wore, the food they eat, the way their days were structured, to remind them to be a separate people, to be a holy people, to be different from the Gentiles.

All of his life Peter had been obedient to the Law and to that diet. He had been taught that pigs were detestable, that they were an abomination, and he had learned the lesson well. So when he heard the command, "Kill and eat; have a porkchop," he was shocked. He'd kept kosher all of his life, and he refused to do it. He said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." God gave him a command and Peter refused to obey him. Now, in fairness to him, he may well have interpreted the command as a test to see if he would disobey God's written word. And for his part, Peter meant his response to be an expression of sincere piety. He was not willfully, knowingly violating an explicit command of God. But still, it was an illogical response, proving his loyalty by disobeying, calling God Lord and then refusing to do what God commanded. It's a contradiction.

But Peter's knowledge was incomplete. He had not considered that the Law of Moses was temporary, even though the Lord had given indications of this. On one occasion, for example, in Mark chapter 7, he told his disciples that it is not what went into a man that defiled the man, meaning food, but what proceeded from the man; that is, from his heart that defiles a person. And Mark adds, "Thus he declared all foods clean," indicating that the Lord had in effect abrogated the food laws. The Law of Moses was about to finish its course. It was about to accomplish its purpose and come to its end. Mosaic Law was a temporary system, but Peter had not understood that. He was still a man obeying the Law.

And so the Lord now makes things plainer. He speaks a second time, in verse 15. "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." But all this was still very confusing to Peter. In his mind, he

was being asked to break the law. It seemed like God was contradicting himself. And while he was puzzling over this, the same thing happened two more times so that this vision occurred to him three times before the sheet was taken up into heaven. God was giving Peter a lesson in dispensational truth. A change had occurred that required a significant adjustment in the thinking of Jewish believers. In fact, it would produce the first great theological struggle in the church at the council of Jerusalem in chapter 15. What is the Gentiles' relationship to the Law? What is the relationship of the Jewish believer, the Christian's relationship to the Law? They would work that out in Jerusalem later.

The point is, the reign of the Law was over. The Commandments, what Paul will speak of in Ephesians in 2:14 as the dividing wall that separated Jews and Gentiles was broken down. The church was under grace and Peter would soon learn that the door had been open to the Gentiles. They would now be saved without becoming Jews.

Well, that's the reason for the vision. That's the purpose of this vision. It went beyond the Jewish diet and it touched directly on Jewish and Gentile relations. The two would be together in the church like those animals were together in the sheet. Peter understood none of this at the time, but he would soon begin to, because as he pondered the vision, the three messengers from Cornelius approached Simon's gate and they asked for him.

What we see in this is something we see all the way through the Bible and what is certainly true theologically in principle, and that is God's timing in everything is perfect. And the incidents here in chapter 10 illustrate the proverb, "The mind of man plans his way, but God directs his steps." Peter made his plans. He decided to go up on the roof to pray. It was probably his custom to do that, and so the time of day came when he normally did that. He made his plans and he went, but all along it was God who was directing his steps, every bit

as much as God had guided the circumstances in Cornelius' life, and we see that here.

The men arrived just after the vision ended. They didn't arrive in the middle of the vision. They didn't interrupt the revelation that Peter was getting. They arrived just as it ended and before it had time to fade from his mind. It was while he was still pondering this that they arrived and that the Holy Spirit spoke to him and told him to welcome the men and go with them without hesitation. And Peter obeyed. He went down. And because he did, the Lord would make him to know the meaning of the vision. That is often the way we learn.

Obedience in matters that we don't understand but which we know are instructions of God lead to understanding. There's much in the Bible that you and I don't understand, but it's clearly in the Bible. And our response is not to say, "No, it's not true. I reject it." It's to believe it and obey it. And as we do that, we learn. Faith precedes knowledge. Those who believe God's word and obey Him are given further understanding. Peter was. He went down the stairs, which usually ran along the side of the house, and he met the men at the gate who then explained to him the reason for their visit, verse 22. "Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man will spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you."

So Peter, a Jew, was to enter the house of a Gentile, and preach the gospel. This was a message that was as unexpected to Peter as that vision had been. But Peter was beginning to see the significance of that vision. God had called these men clean. And so in response Peter took an historic step. He did what no orthodox Jew would have done, what he would not have done prior to that vision - he invited them in and gave them lodging. It was a first step in a new relationship between the Jew and the Gentile in Christ. It was an historic moment.

Now, there are a number of lessons that we learn from this text. First, it indicates that the cross is the end of the Mosaic Law. We

don't have dietary laws. We don't have animal sacrifices. We don't follow the rituals and the special calendar of the Jews. Today God's people are under grace, not law. That's the consistent teaching of the apostles. John 1:17, "The Law as given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ." Romans 10:4, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes." The church is not governed by the law that governed the nation Israel. We still learn from the Law. The Law of Moses is the word of God. It is inspired. It is inherent and we learn about holiness from it, which is its great theme. But the holiness of the Law becomes ours not by keeping commandments, but by believing in Christ, who fulfilled the Law and ended that dispensation by His death and His resurrection.

Now, that doesn't mean that as Christians we don't have rules that govern our lives, that we don't have principles of conduct. We certainly do. Christ is our example. He is our law. We look at Him and we see how we are to live, how we are to respond to others, how we are to live in relationship to the Father Himself. The New Testament gives us principles of conduct, many principles of conduct, and the Holy Spirit guides and enables us to obey them.

But the Law of Moses that governed Israel does not govern the church. It was fulfilled in church. And everyone who believes in Jesus Christ has the holiness, has the righteousness of the Law imputed to his or her at the moment of faith, and we fulfill it all in Christ.

But secondly, we see in Peter the contradictions that are so common in us all. We are new creatures in Christ. The moment of faith, we are justified by our Lord. We are declared righteous. We're not made righteous. But at the moment of faith we are declared righteous, we're forgiven of every sin. We are adopted into God's family. We are fully and completely accepted by Him, but we are righteous sinners. And we still have much of the old life, of the old man still with us, and so we still stumble and we fail. And like Peter, we say, "By no means, Lord."

Christian life is not without its defeats and setbacks. It is a life of growth, but not effortless growth. It is a life of struggles. The spirit against the flesh. Our faith is weak. Our understanding is incomplete. We find ourselves continually thinking and responding wrongly. Perfection is never, never reached in this life. We are perfect in the eyes of God, but the reality is our lives are not perfect. And we should not expect that in this life.

But we should expect improvement. Peter developed. He improved. He responded wrongly, but then he obeyed and he learned and he grew. That's the way of growth in the Christian life. It comes through the process of sanctification, which is a work of the Holy Spirit, in which He renews us in the inner self and enables us to die to sin and live to righteousness. It is a lifelong process. It's never completed in this life. It is a work, as I said, in the inner person, in the soul. But it also has its effect upon the outer man and those around us.

1 Thessalonians 5:23, it makes that clear, that we are sanctified in our spirit, our soul, our body. That bodily sanctification won't occur until our Lord returns, or until the resurrection to come and when we are absolutely transformed and glorified. But that which is outside of us is affected by the inner sanctification that takes place. It has its effect on those whom we have relations with. And by God's grace we are able to be reconciled with others. We're given a heart of reconciliation, a desire for it, the wisdom to do it. And that really brings us to the third lesson of this text, and that is that God can break down barriers and produce agreement where there was division.

He can fix marriages. He can reconcile parents with children. Nothing is too difficult for God. He reconciled the Jew with the Gentile in Christ, and He can do that for you in whatever circumstance of life you find yourself, whatever the difficulties, whatever the estrangements, God can deal with that. He can fix that, as you obey Him, like Peter did. He went down, and against all custom, against all his prejudice, invited the Gentiles in.

Which brings us to a fourth lesson, and really the main meeting of the text. And that is the unclean can become clean by God's grace. All of us, by nature, are those unclean animals that so horrified Peter. And yet by God's grace, He makes the unclean clean. That's His great work of salvation. This is one of the great lessons that Peter learned on that rooftop and through his encounter with the Gentiles. This whole experience taught him something that he knew already. He knew that God's grace reaches to the unworthy. He knew before this ever happened that he was an unworthy sinner. If anybody had learned that lesson, it was Peter, after all of the failures that he had gone through.

But he learned something else here. He learned the breadth, as well as the depth of God's grace, that it is for the most unworthy, those who are saved unexpectedly because of their unworthiness. That is what grace is for. And so we are not to exclude people from the gospel because they are different from us. We are to see the most unlikely places as potential fields of harvest and all kinds of people as potential heirs of grace. We don't know who the elect are. But God has them everywhere. Maybe in your family with a rebellious relative or at your place of work with a fellow colleague. Maybe even in the Mormon temple behind us or in the synagogue up the street.

You know that God can save the Jew. What a reversal we've experienced in our day. When we look at the church, it's a Gentile church and we think the Jews are excluded from all of that. It's the exact position, the idea that the Jew had in the 1st century toward the Gentile. God can save the Jew just as He can save you. God has His elect in every area of the world, every part of the world, and every segment of society, and every tribe and people, tongue, and nation, and He will bring them. Nothing is impossible for Him.

But He won't use you and He won't use me. We won't be the channel of His grace if our hearts are closed to people due to prejudice or disgust. That was the attitude that was expressed in Peter's "by no means, Lord." Remember, Christ associated with and he



ate the publicans and the sinners. That's the way we need to be. Our attitude is to be one of concern for lost souls.

Well, so how do we get that attitude? By realizing that we're no different from them, that we are all unworthy. That is true of every single one of us. What else can be said of people who were dead in their trespasses and sins when God saved us? We're unworthy. H.A. Ironside told a story about his father, that as he lay on his deathbed, this passage about Peter's vision kept running through his head and he kept repeating the verse. "A great sheet and wild beasts and - and -" He couldn't get the next word, so he went back and he started again. "A great sheet and wild beasts and -" He still couldn't get the word. Then a friend bent down and whispered, "John, it says creeping things." "Oh, yes," he said. "That is how I got in, just a poor, good-for-nothing creeping thing, but I got in. Saved by grace." That's how we all got in.

We realize that we were poor, good-for-nothing creeping things. We look to Christ who can make the unclean clean, and He transformed us. He made us acceptable to God. He justified us and now He's working within us to change us and make us increasingly effective servants for the Lord.

It's when we understand that, when we understand that we are not clean, but unclean in and of ourselves, that we are creeping things, save by grace and grace alone, that our attitude changes. And we are ready to receive the unclean and ready to be used of God. May God help us to do that, to understand that, and to be used of Him.

But if you're here without Christ, then you must realize that you are one of those unclean animals. You are one of those creeping things and you are without salvation. You are lost, you are separated from God. You are under His wrath. But He sent His Son to die for sinners, to make the unclean clean. And that's what happens to everyone who turns to Him, everyone who believes in Him without exception is declared clean and acceptable, declared righteous, forgiven of their sins, and received at that moment, at that instant, into God's family.

So may God make you to realize your need and see your condition, because you're like one of those animals, so that you may come to Christ and be changed. As Isaiah said, "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near." If you do that, you will find Him. He will make you to find Him. May God help you to do so, help all of us to rejoice in the change that's occurred in us through the grace of good. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your grace. We come to this text and we look at that sheet that came down from heaven and all those strange animals that filled it up and we realize we were in that, we were unclean. We were separated from You. We were unworthy, and yet You saved us in our lost condition and gave us life and gave us purity, made us Your children. You've clothed us in the righteousness of Christ, blessing beyond comprehension. Not only are we acceptable before You, not only are we in Your family, but we're heirs, joint heirs with Christ with an eternal, ineffable inheritance. What an amazing thing. Help us to appreciate that, Lord, and help us to serve You faithfully in all that we do. We pray these things in Christ name. Amen.