

Keeping Up With The King

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Date: 12 September 2021

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[0 : 0 0] I wish I could say that I have even more Lego for the adults to play with now but I don't make no mistake Stephen and Ruth and Cameron were playing with the bridge building yesterday me and Jennifer took the boys round and we were playing with Thomas train sets and all the stuff and they weren't the boys Thomas train sets they were Ruth's well thank you very much Jean, Eleanor, David thank you Robert for this morning it's great to see everyone it really is, it's great to be here you were saying earlier Jean whatever kind of morning you've had mine has been tearing out tiles and sorting leaks and broken cisterns and stuff like that and then rushing here and finding out the road was closed I was like I don't know where to go it's all good it's all good so thank you for leading us in that and this morning we're in Acts chapter 10 if you have a Bible please turn to that and we're going to read the whole chapter

Heavenly Father we thank you so much for your word we thank you that in a world of unpredictable things a world of uncertainty a world that is so changeable we thank you that your word is true it never changes even after thousands of years of attack and people trying to change or close it up your word has remained and your word will remain we thank you for your word and we thank you we can open it this morning we pray that your spirit would speak to us encourage us encourage us lift us and show us your son Jesus and show us your character and your grace and mercy that your word would illuminate truth to us this morning in Jesus name

Amen well Acts chapter 10 Peter has been going here and there and he's ended up settling in Joppa with Simon the Tanner and it says this in Acts chapter 10 at Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius a centurion of what was known as the Italian cohort a devout man who feared God with all his household he gave alms generously to the people and prayed continually to God at about the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him Cornelius and he stared at him in terror and said what is it Lord and he said to him your prayers your arms have ascended as a memorial before God and now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter he's lodging with one Simon a tanner whose house is by the sea when the angel who spoke to him had departed he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him and having related everything to them he sent them to Joppa the next day as they were on their journey and approaching the city

Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray and he became hungry and wanted something to eat but while they were preparing it he fell into a trance and he saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending being let down by its four corners upon the earth in it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air and there came a voice to him rise Peter kill and eat but Peter said by no means Lord for I've never eaten anything that is common or unclean the voice came to him again a second time what God has made clean do not call common and this happened three times and the thing was taken up at once to 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 stood at the gate and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there and 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 and Peter went down to the men and said

I am the one you are looking for what is the reason for your coming and they said Cornelius a centurion an upright and God-fearing man who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say so he invited them in to be his guests the next day he rose and went away with them and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him and on the following day they entered Caesarea Cornelius was expecting them and called together his relatives and close friends when Peter entered Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him but Peter lifted him up saying stand up I too am a man and as he talked with him he went in and found many persons gathered and he said to them you yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone from another nation but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean so when I was sent for

[6 : 26] I came without objection I asked then why you sent for me Cornelius then said four days ago about this hour I was praying in my house at the ninth hour and behold a man stood before me in bright clothing and said Cornelius your prayers have been heard your arms have been remembered before God send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter he's lodging in the house of Simon a tanner by the sea so I've sent for you at once and you have been kind enough to come now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord so Peter opened his mouth and said truly I understand that God shows no partiality but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him as for the word that he sent to Israel preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ he is

Lord of all you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power and he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil for God was with him and we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem they put him to death by hanging him on a tree but God raised him up on the third day and made him to appear not to all the people but to us who have been chosen by God as witnesses who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead to him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name while Peter was saying these things the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word and the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles for they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God then Peter declared can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have and he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus and then they asked him to remain for some days now we pray that God would bless the reading of his word there are some people in life who can be quite difficult can't there can you think of anyone you know who is quite a difficult person if you can't think of anyone

I'm sorry but it's you but there are there are aren't there we know people who are difficult and let's be honest I'm sure in some ways to some people we can all be a bit difficult but I'm talking about people who you wouldn't describe as being easy going I was in another church recently and I was asked by one of the Christians for pastoral advice on how to deal with a difficult person and this difficult person wasn't a Christian and in this instance there was a sense that the person the person was stuck in their ways about something they were stuck in an unhelpful cycle and perhaps we all know someone like that in fact just this past week we had a young person come in for some help into the church office again someone stuck in an unhelpful cycle and you wondered are you going to be in the same place in ten years time perhaps we all know someone like that and it makes me think of the saying help me help you help me to help you and I was talking recently to a fellow

Christian about a chap a chap who you could say is a difficult person someone who you know would do better in life if they just changed certain things but at the same time the kind of person you know is very unlikely to change the kind of person that you know you are very unlikely able to make any difference in their lives and maybe there is something particular about pastoral ministry that you seem to get to know all the difficult people but I was reflecting on this when I was talking with a fellow Christian about this person that we knew a difficult person we knew and I was reflecting on this and a thought came to me as though it was a subtle and gentle nudge from the spirit of God and this was the thought do you just think that I am giving you these interactions with this person for you to change them isn't it an assumption that in these interactions they are the only one who is supposed to leave changed and not you have you ever considered that I might not be just using have you never considered that I might not just be using you for them but also them for you why not and the realisation left me feeling rather sheepish no pun intended shepherds are sheep as well

I'm still to this day trying to let that sink in these interactions we have with people when we have more knowledge or experience if we're in a better place God is saying do you think your interactions are just so that they can be changed and not you I'm feeling it and I'm trying to let it sink in because whether you're a Christian or not it's easy to think that the other person is the one who needs to change and even if they do even if it would be helpful if they did it's very likely that we all have plenty of room to grow you see even the other day I was telling my youngest son while he was waiting on a particular thing I was telling him that he needs to be patient but while I was telling him that he needs to be patient I was losing my patience don't worry I did notice that at the time you see it's easy to assume that just because we have more experience knowledge or more ability or whatever it is that we are the one who is in a better position to help the other but that's not always the case sometimes we think that they need this all the while

[13:37] God knows what we ourselves are lacking and three examples came to my mind about this three examples about a prophet a priest and an apostle the prophet Jonah was a prophet he was a true prophet of God and though he refused at first to go to Nineveh God moved heaven and earth to get him there but even so in his presumption between him and these foreigners from Nineveh he was the one who seemed like he wouldn't be changed these folks from Nineveh were very ready to change and yet Jonah in his stubbornness would not change even afterwards would not change and he was the prophet of God and these folks were foreigners who didn't even know God secondly a priest remember Zechariah the father of John the Baptist he was a temple priest

I mean if anyone should know better it's a temple priest in the holy city of God no insignificant position and yet when he was visited by an angel he was struck mute because he didn't believe the angels words yet when a young girl from Nazareth Mary a female and a nobody from Nazareth was visited by the same angel she obeyed without hesitation Zechariah should have known better and here in this passage we have Peter the Jewish apostle of Jesus yet he has more difficult more difficulty accepting things compared with a Roman centurion you see when he gets his vision no no no no Lord surely not I'm not going to do that yet when the angel comes to Cornelius yeah let's do that right away this is a thing isn't it in all of these cases these people should have known better and the people that should have known better showed that there was more room for growth in them than there was for others that was a prophet a priest an apostle do we really think that any of us would not have the capacity to do the same and the point isn't to make us feel guilty here but it's to help us remember in every and any circumstance any interaction to be humble and to recall the grace of

God towards us because if there's anyone who is difficult and stubborn to change surely it is ourselves in relation to God we are God's difficult person but praise God praise God that he really is patient he is long suffering and he needs to suffer a long time with me Jesus is our Lord and he is gentle and lowly you see our God is merciful and gracious slow to anger and abounding steadfast love and faithfulness and this this is who we are to imitate with others to show the same kind of grace and so we see this wonderful and hugely significant development in salvation history here in Acts 10 in the prayers of Cornelius these prayers are like the prayers of the Israelites when they're slaves in Egypt God heard them God heard them and it's now time to rescue them and so it is with the Gentiles the non-Jews it's time for the gospel of

Jesus the saving grace of God to go out into the whole world have you ever heard someone who you know isn't a Christian say that they pray what do you think about that I mean we know about verses we have our thoughts does God hear them does God hear sinners I mean we'll maybe allow enough space for a prayer of repentance from a sinner but again it's really easy to put God in a box remember the disciples did that back in Luke chapter 9 the disciples said to Jesus that they saw a man they saw a man way over there casting out demons in Jesus name and they tried to stop him because they weren't following with them does God only hear the prayers of Christians because you need to be in a right relationship with God that's true or do we allow at least for a sinner's prayer of repentance but certainly there are verses that suggest that

God won't answer the prayers of the wicked somebody's praying against the will of God he's not going to answer that why should God answer a prayer that is opposed to his will but what does James and if you've read the book of James what does James mean when he says that the prayer of a righteous man availeth much what does that mean and I'm not trying to blow this wide open and say that just means any old person I'm not trying to do that but I'm just trying to prevent us from making too narrow something that we cannot account for what we see in Cornelius here God hears Cornelius Cornelius isn't a Christian but God hears him and God responds to him surely if there's a prayer of a righteous man that's what this experience sounds like of Cornelius who does what is right and this makes me think about how we talk about sin and depravity about the kingdom of darkness that engulfs this world when we read

[19 : 29] Paul and Romans if you've ever read Romans you'll know that Paul says when he quotes the Psalms he says no one does good not even one and it sounds quite black and white doesn't it but the Psalms have a context for saying that and Paul in Romans is building an argument for saying that saying that in relation to righteousness according to the law the kind of good that is the standard of God kind of good but it confuses us doesn't it because there are people out there people who haven't given to all the evil that they could possibly do whether you're a Christian or not every one of us have a great capacity to do evil but here's a man who's not a Christian who's doing good things and so earlier we were thinking about difficult people but now we're thinking about good people because you probably know someone who's not a Christian but you would say they're a good person how do you reconcile that with Paul's words they're a good person maybe a neighbour maybe a family member whatever there's good people the Bible's not saying that there aren't good people that there aren't any good people that's not what the

Bible's saying but maybe you struggle to see how a person who is good could perish simply because they don't believe in Jesus is that fair I mean surely God knows that they're a good person but here in Acts chapter 10 what we must understand is that when Peter says in verse 34 in every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God he isn't saying that anyone who does that is saved that's not what he's saying he's saying that's the kind of thing that God accepts it's the kind of thing God wants to see in the world praise God for good people but he isn't saying they're saved he isn't saying that they're sinless nor is he saying that because they generally do good and have regard for God that they are forgiven and will go to heaven that's not what he's saying you see as good as your friend might be as good as your husband or wife or son or daughter or neighbor or friend is it will never be good enough to save them it will never be good enough to stop the wages of sin which is death it will never clear the debt of sin before a holy

God and it will never cancel the claim of Satan against us there is there is a legitimate claim on every single sinner of death and no matter how good you are it's never going to cancel that you see good is never good enough as good as Cornelius is as acceptable as his prayers are to God they cannot save him but what it does do is it stands out to God like a memorial you see the truth is no matter how good or bad someone is there is only one way to be saved there is only one way to be forgiven there is only one road just one road that leads to heaven you see all religions do not lead to God there is but one single way to God and that is through his son Jesus Christ there is only one way to be forgiven and that is through Jesus on the cross on our behalf there is only one way to eternal life and that is knowing Jesus the

Christ the son of God who died and was raised in the third day no other person has done that so what does God do with a centurion who is truly trying to please God what does God do with the good people that me and you know what does God do well Luke leaves it until chapter 11 verse 14 but he says that when the angel spoke to Cornelius he also told him why he was to send for Peter because in chapter 11 verse 14 he says this this is what part of the message of the angel to Cornelius the angel says this is why you have to send for Peter because he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved you and all your household so when we think about the fact that there are genuinely good people around there but were perplexed at why they could perish just the same way as an evil person we must remember that no amount of good in any person will ever be good enough but

God has made a way for all people to be saved and he desires that the message of salvation be declared to such people see as though God is saying as though God is saying to Cornelius I've heard your prayers I really am pleased with your charity sinner I'm pleased with what you're doing but you're still going to die I'm a holy God justice needs to be dealt but there's a way and I'm going to get a message to you to let you know the way let me get you a message about my son Jesus who died for you because I love you let me get to you a message about Jesus who took that sin this message is the way to be saved it's the only way to be saved and Cornelius boy am I going to make sure you hear it you see

[25 : 05] Cornelius has done his bit God has been at work in him to prepare him for the gospel and in some ways the work has been less work than he needs to do in Peter I remember hearing someone say this about evangelism if you're going to speak to someone about God speak to God about them first now that's really really really good advice but I'm also reminded of my own personal need for God to prepare me for God to make me receptive to who he might want me to speak to to change my own heart and open me up to the possibilities of what God might be doing you see in some things to pray starts thinking about food I can relate to that it's interesting though because Peter is staying with a man called Simon who's a tanner by the sea and tanners if you remember that occupation was considered to make you ceremonially unclean so there's a sense that

Peter's already opening up about this but he needs more convincing before he enters the house of a non-jew he needs more convincing before he sits at the table and eats food with a Gentile and I don't know exactly why he was shown this vision three times what God has made clean do not call common but I've wondered if perhaps it's in relation to the three Gentiles who come for him three times you need to go with these people without hesitation yeah they might be Gentiles because in verse 19 the spirit says to Peter behold three men are looking for you rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation because I have sent them without hesitation and credit to Peter he does invites them in to be guests so that they can go in the morning he extends hospitality to

Gentiles this is no small thing and when he arrives at the centurion's house when Cornelius falls down and worships him he doesn't entertain it one bit stand up I'm a man as well and he then makes it clear that he knows that it was unlawful for him to be there for a Jew to be there in a Gentile's house but God has shown him that he shouldn't call even a Gentile like Cornelius unclean so he came he came without objection he says I'm getting this Cornelius I'm getting it I've got a vision as well and I'm getting this I'm not going to call you unclean anymore I'm here I came without objection but why why was I supposed to come and Cornelius says his experience he says I'm grateful that you came it's kind enough for you to come but from Peter that God gave him and then Peter says truly

I understand that God shows no partiality isn't it refreshing to see that an apostle someone who spent all this time with Jesus has still enough room to be surprised by God still working it out still learning more and more about the character of God we're all in the same position we can all still be surprised by God we never have it all figured out we never may we never think that we cannot be surprised and amazed at learning something new about God so Peter takes this opportunity and he's probably glad to preach the gospel without being persecuted great I've got a room full of people who want to hear this so he preaches his heart out preaches that Jesus is the spirit filled and powerful Messiah and Lord that Jesus was doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil he preaches about his death on the cross and his resurrection on the third day he says that they are chosen witnesses and that

Jesus is the appointed judge of the living and the dead and he preaches that all who believe in him receive forgiveness of sins through his name he covers every base and it's as if God cannot wait to pour his spirit out on these people you see even as Peter is still speaking the Holy Spirit falls on them and Peter realizes that it would be completely counterproductive to God's purposes to prevent water baptism at this moment you see the two sides of this bridge between Jews and Gentiles finally meeting in the middle suddenly these two worlds have been connected by the grace and gospel of God and it's as if God has been at work in this man's life and family and he just needs to borrow Peter's mouth he just needs Peter's mouth so that they hear the gospel and that could complete the job to bring them to faith in Jesus because he doesn't want them to perish doesn't want anyone to perish he wants this message of salvation to go out to everyone because no matter how good people are it's never enough and that's not that it doesn't mean something to

[30 : 21] God God wants people to be good but it's never going to be enough and that's why God sent his son in the first place but he wants everyone to hear about that so that they have an opportunity to be saved does God need us the short answer is no absolutely not and you might even think about Acts chapter 10 why does God even use Peter anyway you might think why does he even use an angel or you might think when the angel visited Cornelius why didn't the angel just preach the gospel why does he need Peter well four things about that firstly although angels are amazing and terrifying and glorious beings created by God servants and literally messengers of God God has given the privilege of declaring the gospel to humans not angels it's by God's design that this treasure should be in jars of clay and it is right that by using us it should be clear that the power is with God and not us it's a complete grace of

God that we should be used at all just as God sent his son into the world so his son sent his followers into the world secondly as we are his followers we are associated with him we carry his name we carry the name of Jesus and proclaim his name and so God does not want anyone to be in any doubt as to what the way of salvation is and who it is it's only through Jesus his son and the ones who were his witnesses you see Peter is a witness the apostles are witnesses and all those who hold to the apostles teaching continue that witness so that there may be no doubt to this gospel message and the person of Jesus there can't be any doubt God doesn't want people to be mistaken God wants everyone to know the way of salvation and Jesus says I am the way so it needs to be through the people who are associated with Jesus so that the world can know oh it's not this person it's not that person it's got to be

Jesus there can be no doubt about the way of salvation you see because remember Paul in Galatians if you've read that Paul says even if an angel of heaven should preach a different gospel contrary to the message of the apostles let him be accursed because if it doesn't come through the testimony of the chosen witnesses then what you're going to end up with is something like Mormonism a different gospel coming from an angel you're going to end up with people who don't know the way a different Jesus a different gospel and every other religion every other religion is by man's work and if that happens no one's going to make it you can't be good enough no one's going to make it so there can be no doubts about this when God completes this bridge that he's building from both sides in order for everyone on both sides to accept it it has to be someone like Peter cutting the ribbon thirdly when God is uniting people and breaking down the walls of hostility he builds the bridges from both sides doesn't he

God uses people to bring in people because if both sets of people all something that both sets of people always need to understand it's the grace of God in Christ so for us God using us is a way that we learn not only to see the grace of God in them but also for ourselves for ourselves to demonstrate the grace of God as we welcome people in without partiality without partiality you see it's a way for us to learn obedience and grace and love it's a way for us to grow we need to grow as well into the fullness of Christ and fourthly well it's for our encouragement that we should have the privilege of doing this that we should be given the power to do this that we should be used by the spirit and be useful in his plan that we should see through all of this how much

God really is at work is the most thrilling and encouraging thing to build us up that we would not only see lives transformed for Christ but that we can play a part in bringing the good news to a world full of bad news that we can play a part in bringing hope to a world full of despair and light to a world full of darkness that is something that will supercharge your faith in Christ you see in all of this we are never the first on the scene we are never having to do all the work in fact we do very little work but the work that he has given us to do is glorious we see that God is always at work Jesus has always been working in the lives of others long before he calls us to bring the good news in all of this we see that we really are just trying to keep up with the king as he prepares more and more people for his kingdom may we always be ready to tell people how to get in and also be the welcome party for them amen let me pray and then we're going to sing one last song heavenly father we thank you so much for your grace towards even us the only way that any of us this morning can know about

[36 : 07] Jesus and believe in him is because of this moment in acts because your servants in the past humans flawed humans in the past have recognized the grace of God towards themselves in Christ and have seen that you show no partiality that even people like us are welcomed into your kingdom can be forgiven in the name of Jesus and so Lord we give you great thanks for that we give you praise and thanks for Jesus Christ and for the people who have proclaimed the good news in Jesus Christ and Lord may we always be ready to open our mouths to share the good news knowing confidently that you are at work in this world and you are preparing people and may you always be preparing us as well we pray in Jesus name Amen Amen Thank you