

What Ought We to Do?

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[0:00] Take your Bibles this morning, turn over to Acts chapter 10. Acts chapter 10 this morning, As we've been over in John 15 for a few weeks, we're going to move over to Acts chapter 10 this morning.

And spend the next couple of weeks, Lord willing, here looking at some things here from Acts chapter 10. Because I think it's important, the things we're going to be looking at here. But the thing about this, let me ask you a question.

How many know somebody that fits this description? They pay their bills, they keep their word, they love their family, and try to do right by everyone around them.

How many people know somebody like that? You know? And when people talk about them, what do they say? Well, that's what? A good person. But you know, I want you to understand, we're going to look here in Acts chapter 10 this morning.

Because being a good person, doing the right things, doesn't get you to heaven. And we're going to find here in Acts chapter 10, because that idea brought forth, because oftentimes the measurement we use is wrong.

[1:17] You know, I've been around many times when people have passed away, and you'll hear them say, well, there's a good person. You know, this is what they did. You know, really, as a believer, it ought to put something up in our mind, because if you're going to heaven because of what you did, there's a problem.

Because getting to heaven has nothing to do about you. It has what you have done with what Jesus did. And that's going to be the essential element we're going to look here this morning, because we're going to meet a man who checked all the boxes, but still needed something he didn't have. The man we're going to look at this morning is by the name of Cornelius, and he was a centurion. He was a Roman. Matter of fact, the Bible's going to tell us he was Italian, which makes things rather interesting as you read through this account, to find out who this man was and what he was doing.

But he did all these things, and he asked a question, what ought I to do?

That's an important question. What ought I to do? And what he was asking a question in regards to God and what God was doing.

[2:39] And so if you found Acts chapter 10 this morning, let's stand together in honor of the reading of the Word of God, and we'll read down here the first eight verses of this chapter. We'll cover the chapter as we go through here in the next couple of weeks, but let's just set the stage here.

It tells us here in verse 1, it says, There was a certain man of Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, one that feared God with all his house, and he gave much alms to the people and prayed to God always.

And he saw a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming into him and saying unto him, Cornelius. And he looked on him, and he was afraid and said, What is it, Lord?

And he said unto him, Thy prayer and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter.

He lodges with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside, and he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

[3:48] And when the angel which had spoken unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devote soldier of them that waited on him continually.

And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. So let's pray. Heavenly Fathers, we just come before you this morning. Lord, we're just thankful for your word.

Lord, we're thankful what we're going to learn here in Acts chapter 10. Lord, what we learn about what we ought to do. Lord, both to be saved and even after we're saved, as we're going to look at these things here.

And Lord, we pray that you'd challenge, encourage, convict. Lord, you know the need of each one here today. Lord, if there's one here that doesn't know you as Savior and understand the reality of it, but that it's not just a mental thing or an acknowledgement of you, but it's an acknowledgement of our sin and what you provided for us.

And Lord, we pray that you'd just stir hearts today, Lord, that we might never forget what great sacrifice you made for us. And Lord, we just thank you and praise you in Jesus' name.

[4:54] Amen. Amen. You may be seated. You know, as we come to Acts chapter 10, it's been about 10 years since Pentecost. You know, I always find it important when you're reading the scriptures, try to figure out the timeframes.

You know, how long has something been going and it makes a difference? I mean, what's the timeframe between things? And that helps us understand the context and the dynamic of what's been happening.

And we know that the early churches had grown and made great strides in reaching a lot of people. You know, there were 3,000 saved on the day of Pentecost there in Acts chapter 2.

You know, not long after that, there was 5,000 men saved in Acts chapter 4. We know that by Acts 9, there was a church established in Damascus.

You know, you think about the spread and the dynamic of believers going forth and talking about what Jesus Christ had done for others.

[5:56] We know that these different elements had come to pass and things were going great. I mean, you talk about a church growth program. In 10 years, they had tens of thousands of people reached.

But we find here nobody had reached Cornelius. Nobody had reached him with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And we're going to see here that they were doing a great job, but they still had not fulfilled the things that they had been commanded to do. They'd done a good job in reaching people, mainly Jews, but not the Gentiles that also needed the gospel.

I mean, you think about what did Jesus, his last instructions to his disciples were pretty simple.

Think about Mark 16, 15, where he tells them this, Go ye into all the world and what?

Preach the gospel to every creature. He tells them in Acts 1, in verse 8, he says, Ye shall receive power after the Holy Ghost is upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and Judea and in Samaria and into the uttermost part of the earth.

[7:10] Now, I want you to understand that the uttermost part of the earth was the part they stumbled with. And we're going to look next week a little bit about Peter, because I think even today sometimes we stumble over the same things that Peter stumbled with and struggled with, because it has to do with how we think about others.

You know, I want you to know the importance of that, because this included the Gentiles, and the Gentiles had been being overlooked, but the good news is that God had not forgotten his commandment and his instruction that everybody needs to know.

God said that had not changed. And this morning we find a Gentile that's desiring to be right with God, yet lacking something in understanding.

You know, look over there back in verse 6 where we read in our text. Notice what it tells us there. At the end it says, and he says to send for Simon, or send for Peter who is in one Simon a tanner's house by the seaside, and he said, He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

In other words, he says, call for Peter. Peter knows what you need to know. Peter knows what you're seeking for. Peter knows what you need.

[8:31] Because I want to look here this morning, because the thing about Cornelius, he was moral but lost. I mean, everything about Cornelius screamed on the outside.

He's an upstanding guy. He was moral. He was a man that people wanted to be around. You know, we find in verse 1 his position a little bit here.

He says he commanded a detachment of Romans deployed from Italy. They were Romans. You know, he was likely one by birth, and most likely he had been taught about the Romans, gods, and everything about their polytheistic worship.

You know, we live in a society today that's the same as the Romans were of that day. They're very polytheistic. You say, preacher, what do you mean? Well, when a Christian, somebody who professes to know Christ says, well, karma did that, you know what they're doing?

They're being polytheistic. Because we've incorporated pagan thought into Christian ideas.

[9:40] Polytheistic. I mean, I could go on to the examples. But you know what? Cornelius grew up in a polytheistic society. Worship your gods.

You know, he makes it clear he was a good soldier. He was a good man. He was a person that can be very moral.

As a matter of fact, it tells us he was quite religious. It says he prayed. You know, he did everything he ought to do in the humanly speaking. But yet he still lacked something very important.

He still lacked what was required. But it's interesting about Cornelius, because somewhere along the way, he became acquainted with the Lord God of heaven.

Somewhere along the way, somebody had influenced him with the truth that there is one God, the God that created heaven and earth, the God who everything is set in order, the God he's going to one day be accountable to.

[10:48] He understood those things. He would have been exposed to the religion of the Jews.

He'd been exposed to Old Testament Judaism. And we're going to see here this dynamic, because look here at verse 2.

It starts out, he was a devout man. In other words, he was a good man. He was devout. You know, this word devout means yielding a solemn and reverential attention to God in religious exercises, particularly in prayer.

In other words, he was very systematic in his worship of God. Or should I say his attempted worship of God. He was very plain in what he did.

He understood the importance of it. He was a very religious individual. You know, today, there's many people that are religious. They've made a decision.

They've recognized God, the one of scriptures, the one they ought to worship, that they ought to pay attention to. And they become very religious. They do the ritualistic steps.

[11:56] You know, they go through the ritual. But he had made a decision to worship the God of heaven. And while you can be religious, I want you to understand, you can be lost and you can be wrong.

Because one thing you're going to find is everybody is religious. You know, it always amazes me that an atheist says, well, I'm not religious. Well, yes, they are. They practice, by definition, a religion.

Because religion has to do with your belief system. What do you believe and how do you practice it? What do you base it upon? You know, that is a religious dynamic.

It's something that is set forth. You can deny it. You can say it doesn't happen. But the reality is, that's how it is. You know, and for a Gentile of his day, this meant the worship.

He had rejected this polytheistic worship of many gods and chose to worship the Lord God of heaven, which stands in contrast to the gods of the day.

[12:59] You know, if you think about it, as a Roman soldier, he had been raised to honor Roman gods like Mars, the god of war, and pay homage to the emperor himself as a living god through the imperial cult, his own legion from Rome would have sworn to.

You know, Cornelius made a choice to walk away from all those things because he saw something in the reality of who God is. He understood there was a God that he was going to be held accountable to.

And we see many today that are far worse off than Cornelius, and they're still bound up in the same false worship, a culture that is obsessed with immorality and fornication and the exploitation of the vulnerable that comes with it.

I mean, we see that happening all around us today. In America, we have a lot of people who were like Cornelius when he started, but the problem is, we have a lot of people who moved from where Cornelius started his life to just being religious.

I want you to understand religion does not get you to heaven. Religion does not remove your sin.

Cornelius had the right idea and the right concept.

[14:12] He was working with the information that he had, but there was a problem. We know that he had turned away from all those other gods. He was a devout man who knew God, said not to

worship anything or anyone but him.

You know, you think about it, he'd probably been addressed sometime with like Exodus chapter 20 where it tells us, thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make into thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or is that in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth.

Thou shalt not bow thyself down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children under the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.

I have a feeling when Cornelius was confronted with that, he had to make a decision because he had spent his life previous to becoming religious or continuing changing of religion because changing religions doesn't save you.

But he knew who God was. You know, very likely Cornelius would have been what we find was a proselyte of the gate. In other words, he was a Gentile who understood who God was.

[15 : 29] Matter of fact, it would have been very likely that he would have went and stood outside the synagogue to hear what was being said. He wanted to learn about God, but he hadn't taken the steps to become Jewish.

You know, the Bible speaks and gives hints to individuals who were like Cornelius. They recognized God, they stood outside the gate, they wanted to hear what they could hear, but you know what? There was something separating them. There was a separation and we find here that he would come to listen, but he wouldn't be allowed to associate with the Jews.

They were kind of an outcast on the edge. You know, when we realize that Cornelius had to make a choice, he chose to worship God even though others almost made him an outcast.

Like, if you don't go all the way and doing everything that we want you to do and go through the religious things, you can't have a relationship with God. You know, the Old Testament's filled with people who feared God, who loved God, but yet weren't Jewish.

[16 : 39] You'll find them scattered throughout. They recognized who God is and what God had done, but you know, the problem is today we have a lot of people that are oftentimes religious and people who are polytheistic.

You know, today in America, there are a lot of people who worship many gods. They come to church on Sunday and worship another god on Monday. Even though you say, well, they don't, what do they bow down to?

You know, some people bow down to a bank balance. How much money can I have in there? What am I worried about? You know, all these things. You know, there's people today worry about a credit score.

I mean, think about the list of things that you get advertised to. That's what people are being drawn to. What's your portfolio look like? You know, buy gold now.

That's your security. Now, I want you to understand of themselves, it's not, they're not the problem themselves, it's the way people treat them.

[17 : 42] Because think about what Jesus told the disciples in Luke 16, he says, no servant can serve two masters for either he will hate the one and love the other or else he will hold the one and despise the other.

He cannot serve God and mammon. That's money. You know, money can become a god to people. You know, they'll do anything for it. They'll lie, they'll cheat.

You know, today you find people that, well, I'm a believer but I'm going to bet my money on the sportsbook app so I can get more of it. You know, there's some people who check their bank app and their crypto wallet more than they pray.

I want you to understand there's people today who spend their money on wine and revelry. You know, there was a Roman god for that called Bacchus. That's how they worshipped him was wine and revelry.

Now, that's an old word, revelry, but today let's translate it. That's called partying. I'm going to go out and party. I'm going to feel good. You know what they're saying?

[18 : 43] They're being, want to worship in a form contrary to the things of God. Because a God is something we give priority to.

You know, many of us have our financial priorities all out of whack, you know, to name among many things. I mean, you could talk about money, you could talk about priorities, you could talk

about all sorts of areas of life where we're out of whack.

And we understand that we need to put God first. Now, I want you to understand, God doesn't mind us having nice things as long as we don't put them ahead of him.

You know, in America, we have more than most of the world. We have a nice building to come to that thankfully the air conditioning works. You know, there's many places in the world they're sitting on benches next to a tree to hear the word of God.

I wonder how many people, if we had it out in the park a couple of weeks ago when it was almost 100 degrees, how many people would have showed up? Because we can put our comfort above God. I want you to understand, Cornelius, that's the way he began, but he changed.

[19 : 50] He became very religious. He was a devout man. He had turned away from every idol that the culture chased. He was a good moral man, a religious man, but the problem was he wasn't saved.

Notice back in verse 2, not only was he a devout man, notice this, and one that feared God with all his house. You know, Cornelius was a God-fearing man. Proverbs tells us that the fear of the Lord isn't cowering towards God, but a reverence in awe about God and taking God seriously.

You know, the fear of the Lord is not fear in the sense of trembling because God's just going to crush me. the fear of the Lord is understanding the awe of who God is, that he is an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present creator, that we ought to understand Cornelius feared God.

But I want you to tell you, fearing God is not going to get you to heaven. It'll help because it'll point you in the right direction, just like Cornelius, but just fearing God.

Well, I fear God. That's not going to get you to heaven. Notice what Proverbs tells us. Proverbs 1 and verse 7 tells us this. It says, but the fear of the Lord is, notice this, the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

[21 : 19] Notice that it's what? The beginning. It's not the end. Proverbs 9, 10, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

Proverbs 8, 13, the fear of the Lord is to hate evil, pride and arrogance in the evil way and the forward mouth do I hate. You know what?

All it tells us is Cornelius was a man who understand there was going to be accountability. Because the fear of the Lord helps us understand there's a God you're going to answer to one day. We ought to live in the fear of the Lord.

The fear of awe of who He is. But I want you to understand here that Cornelius was a moral individual who ordered his life around the reality that God would one day judge his actions.

You know, that might describe you today. You live carefully because you know you'll answer to God someday. That's a healthy fear, but a healthy fear of God will never save anyone.

[22 : 24] Cornelius feared God rightly and he still wasn't saved. I want you to notice, look at the third thing that it tells us. And he gave much alms to the people. You know what that tells us?

He was a generous man. Cornelius was a generous man. He was willing to help those in need. He gave to charity. You know, it's like people today, I find things, you know, something comes up, well, somebody opened a GoFundMe, so I'm going to give them some money.

Because it's going to make me feel good. It amazes me how many people jump on every need that somebody has to give a little bit and they replace that, you know, well, look at me, look at what I'm giving, you know, that should make me good.

There's nothing wrong to giving to need, but I want you to understand, giving to needs of others isn't going to save you. I want you to see this with Cornelius because today, you know, as Americans, we open our wallets in a moment of anything happening, a hurricane or a wildfire hits the news and Americans are some of the most generous people on earth.

You know, statistics show that as a general, Americans are the most generous people. But you know what? Generosity doesn't get you to heaven. Cornelius was a generous man. He was like that, but he wasn't saved.

[23 : 38] Yeah, I want you to understand, you can't buy your way to heaven. Cornelius was a good man. He did those things. He trusted God.

I want you to notice something else. It says that he prayed to God always. He was a praying man.

You know, I believe God listens to sincere prayer and He desires for you to know Him.

You know, Isaiah 55 tells us this. He says, Seek ye the Lord while you may be found. Call ye upon Him while He is near. Now, I want you to understand, the story of Cornelius, there is some

uniqueness to it because of the early nature.

Cornelius was operating in the information that he had. But the information he had was not sufficient. He needed more. He feared God. He was a good man in everybody's eyes.

He did what he ought to do. But he understood he was calling upon God and God was there. You know, Jeremiah 29 verse 12 says this, Then ye shall call upon me and ye shall go and pray unto me and I will hearken unto you and ye shall seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart.

[24 : 52] That described Cornelius. He was devout. He feared God. He gave alms to the people. He prayed to God always. But verse 3 and 4 reveals something.

There was still something missing. There's something he needed to know. Look at verse 3 and he says, He saw a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming into him and saying unto him, Cornelius.

And when he looked on him he was afraid and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. You know what it tells us?

That God paid attention to Cornelius because I believe Cornelius was sincere in what he was doing. But sincerity doesn't save you. But him being sincere before God, open before God, God said, I'm going to make a way for you to know what you need to know.

You know, it proves he wasn't saved. His prayers were heard and answered. I want you to understand that I believe God sometimes answers prayers of the lost. You know what he's doing? He's saying, Hey, I want you to know I am here.

[26 : 03] I know who you are. You know, I want you to understand you can't say you're saved because you've had a prayer answered. Because it might just be simply God did that so you might know that he's real.

That he's true. That you need to realize though you need to be born again and ask him to save your soul. That's the most important prayer you can pray to God.

God. Because that's the only one that transforms you. That changes you. That makes you new.

You know, God took note of Cornelius not because just his good actions because he was sincerely doing the things that wanted to seek God.

Cornelius was doing with what he thought he ought to do. And he was sincerely seeking God and God sent him an answer.

God took note the fearing God and that he was seeking Him. But let's be clear none of that could save Cornelius in spite of all his prayer he still wasn't saved.

[27 : 13] In spite of his devotion and generosity and respect for God and even his country he wasn't saved. Because look at verse 6. It says, And he lodged with one Simon a tanner whose house was by the seaside.

Now notice this. He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. You know, one thing I can reassure you God will tell you how to be right with Him. If you're sincerely seeking Lord, I need to be right with you you know what God's going to do?

He's going to send somebody with the message of reality of what you need. God will do that. He will send somebody unto you.

God will open your eyes to hear and to understand. God honored him by sending him the light he needed to be saved.

How did he do that? He said, Send for Peter. Peter knows what you need. Peter knows what you're missing. Peter has the answer.

[28 : 17] Look over into chapter 10. Look down in verse 42 for a moment. We'll talk about this a little more next week but I want you to see Peter's answer. When Peter finally gets to Cornelius, he begins to preach and he begins to tell him what was going on.

It talks about the word which God did. That word, verses 36 and 37. Now look down here at verse 42. And notice what Peter says.

And he commanded us to preach unto the people and to testify. It is he which was ordained of God to be the judge of the quick and the dead to give him all the prophets witness that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

Now I want you to understand your good works don't save you. No matter how religious you are, it's not going to make a difference. You know when Jesus was made a statement, when people come to him and says, Lord look what I did in your name.

And they're all good deeds. And Jesus looks at him and says, depart from me ye worker of iniquity, I never knew you. You know why that is?

[29 : 32] Because they never understood who Jesus truly is. They needed not good works, not reforming themselves, they needed a savior.

You know today, maybe you've assumed you were saved because of what you did, your good intentions, your good works, or just I have a good heart. But today you realize you haven't crossed the threshold that's important to realize you cannot save yourself.

Only Jesus can save you. Or maybe you're sitting where Cornelius sat before Peter ever showed up. Religious, moral, and respected, but quietly letting your religion stand in for a real relationship with Christ.

Cornelius still had to hear, he had to believe in order to be saved. Going through the motions was never enough to save him. It isn't enough for you or I either.

Religious activity saves nobody. And I want you to understand this morning as we look at Cornelius, it's an important thing to grab a hold of.

[30 : 39] Because we need to ask ourselves, do you believe in Jesus Christ and what he did for you? To understand the importance of what Christ did for us.

That he was the very son of God, he came in the form of man, he paid the price for something we could not pay ourselves, he took the penalty of death upon him, and he rose victorious the third day.

When we understand what's taking place here, Cornelius heard and understood for the first time what the answer really was. He had been waiting for that answer instead of simply obeying what God, what he understood about God, what he'd already been given, he understood his need to confess that Jesus Christ is the Savior.

That it stands alone. You know, today, sadly, there's two forms of the gospel that I believe are false in core.

One is a magical prayer. One, two, three, repeat after me, now you're good. We've tapped you in. You know, I want you to understand, if there's never been a heart change, there's no salvation.

[31 : 56] You can repeat mantras and whatever you want to do. You know, a lot of people treat the prayer of salvation, it's almost like a mantra that somebody else or even the people from India preach and teach.

Just repeat this over and over again, you'll be okay. You know what? Repeating something doesn't save you. Understanding you're a sinner that needs a Savior. You know, there's a lot of religious people who miss the fact that they're a sinner and they need a Savior.

I want you to understand, that's the light that Cornelius needed. And you need to obey what God has said. That is the good news of Jesus Christ. He is the one who came and died for you.

I want you to understand that God wants you to know what He's done for you. Cornelius was seeking. And you know what?

If you're here today and not saved, I know one thing, you're seeking something. You need to ask yourself a question. Has there been a moment in time when you can look at to say, I know that's the moment I called upon Jesus Christ recognizing I'm a sinner, that He paid my debt, and I asked Him to say, Lord, put what you have done please to my account just as you have offered.

[33 : 20] It happens in a moment. It happens in an instant. You know, we find in this passage why Peter preached the Holy Spirit fell upon Him.

You know what it tells us? Because at the moment of salvation, you get all the Spirit of God. We'll talk about some of that next week. There's a lot in Acts chapter 10 to cover.

But I want you to understand who Cornelius was. Who was this message to that Peter was to bring? Because there's many people today that are just like Cornelius.

Good people by outward standard miss the fact that they cannot be good enough to get to heaven. It's only through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, the pain, the penalty for your sin and for mine.

What about you this morning? Maybe you're here and you're not sure.

[34 : 24] If you're not sure, I encourage you. We're going to have a chance to respond here in just a moment. Pray that you'll have the courage to say, Lord, I want to know not what the preacher says, not what Plains Baptist Church says, but what does the book say on how to be saved?

It's the only thing that matters. Maybe you're saved today and forgot what Christ did for you. Maybe you seem to take a moment to thank him for his salvation.

Maybe it's being obedient to him. Maybe there's an area of your life that you've been holding out on that says, Lord, no, I need to be faithful in that.
Because of what you've done for me, I need to do. That's you. Don't leave here the same way you came in. As heads are bowed and eyes are closed this morning, what about you today?
Heavenly Father,