

Behold My Servant

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[0 : 00] I want us to turn back to the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 10. And it's a long chapter, but it's certainly the latter part of the chapter I want us to consider. And we find that Peter, we read in verse 23, 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, and so on.

Now, the study of the Acts of the Apostles certainly makes really interesting reading, because there we have the growth of the early church. And it was an amazing time, must have been a wonderful time to have been part of that. It was a day of great manifestation of God's power, and where the gospel, it spread just like wildfire, with great power in these days.

And we've always got to remember that God is the one who builds his church. God uses us, just ordinary people. We are all involved in our own little way here and there, with this and that. But at the end of the day, it's God's work. The initiative is always his. It's his church, and he will build it. He will build it despite every opposition, and he will build it despite every personal failure, even of his people. But he's building it slowly and surely, powerfully, dramatically. And at the end of the day, that building will be absolutely complete. There will not be one place missing. There won't be one person unaccounted for. All will be there. Out of all the millions and millions, in fact, a number, we're told that nobody can really number. God, of course, numbers them. The number who had been brought in is so vast. But here we have the church in its very, very early days, as we would say in its infancy. And we have here really quite a remarkable story, and it involves two people. One is this centurion. We read about Cornelius, and we read at the beginning this man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian cohort, a devout man, and a man who was seeking and searching for God, a man who was so committed and so dedicated, a man who was giving of his own possessions for the good of the cause, and yet a man who still had questions, a man who hadn't come to certainly a full assurance of faith, a man who was struggling. There were things he needed. And so, God is working in this man, Cornelius, but he's also working in Peter, the man he sends to Cornelius. Now, Cornelius, as we said, is a man who is really seeking the Lord. And I think I've said it before, that seeking the Lord is not something that we stop doing when we come to faith. We sometimes use the expression, a seeker. Somebody is a seeker, seeking the Lord. And of course, that's what a person does when they are wanting the Lord, and when a person becomes aware of their own need. And a person, maybe there are people we would term seekers here tonight. You want to be a Christian. There are things in your way, but you say that above all, at the end of the day, what I really want is to come to peace with God in Jesus Christ. Things I don't understand, and there are things that are hindering me, and there are times I feel that I'm moving in the right direction, and other times I don't feel

I'm moving at all. But a person who is seeking the Lord, if you are...let me say this, if tonight you are really seeking the Lord, you will find Him. Because the Bible says that those who truly seek will find. Why are you seeking the Lord? That's quite an important question. Well, I would say if you are truly seeking the Lord, it is because the Lord is seeking you. That's what Jesus said, that He has come to seek and to save that which is lost. And we seek the Lord in response to His seeking us. And He seeks us, and He will find us. And if you tonight are seeking the Lord, it is in response to the Lord having touched your heart. That's what happens. And when a person comes to faith in the Lord, and comes to the point where they say, you know, I love the Lord. Why do you come to love the Lord?

[5 : 23] It is because the Lord has first loved you. That's what the Bible says. We love Him who first loved us. So, we've always got to remember that the initiative always lies with the Lord. And we are

here, and we've always got to see it. You're here tonight in God's providence. There are many people in the whole scheme of providence who are not in church, who are not under the Word. And I would say that is the most encouraging thing where you find yourself under the Word. Now, again, we might say that the soul that is seeking, we've just said that, of course, is seeking in response to what God is doing within the heart. Because we've got to remember that the natural response of the heart is to run away from God. And many, many, many people, that's what they're doing tonight.

They're not aware. They're not consciously thinking, hey, I'm on the run from God. I'm going in the opposite direction to God. But people who willingly choose to have nothing to do with God's Word or with God's ways or coming to church or anything, they say, no, this is, I'm not even thinking about that. They are doing the very thing that Adam and Eve did at the very beginning. Because remember, at the very beginning, after the fall, the first thing that Adam and Eve did as the presence of God drew near, they ran away. And that's what people have continued to do ever since. People are on the run. And there's loads of people tonight who are on the run to get as far away from God as possible. And we would all be doing that. We'd all be on the run unless God had intervened. And God has intervened wonderfully in His Son, Jesus Christ. And it is Jesus, as we know, as the good shepherd who has come to seek and to save that which is lost. But you know, there are some people who have come to faith, some believers, and maybe where they might be young in the faith, and they might be older in the faith. And they're anxious about where they are. And they're saying, you know, I don't really know. I don't really know if I'm a believer anymore, because I don't feel the presence of the Lord. And you know, there are people who tonight maybe are so anxious and so upset because they fear that the Lord is not present with them. In fact, it's their greatest fear.

It's their greatest anxiety. Why? Because they cannot bear the thought of not belonging to the Lord. Well, I would say that that is an indication, an indicator, a proof that they have the Lord.

Because the soul that is in fear of not having the Lord, the soul that is so desiring the Lord, is the soul that has the Lord. You might not have a conscious sense of His presence, but that very reaction that is in your heart is proof that you do belong to the Lord, the Lord that you want above all. Anyway, we find here that God is at work in two totally different ways with Cornelius and with Peter. Cornelius has to come to a full persuasion of faith. Peter, on the other hand, is somebody who has to come to understand that the gospel of Jesus Christ is as much for the Gentile as it is for the Jew. And Peter is somebody, all his prejudices have to be broken. And let me say that's not an easy thing. It's one of, you know, it's one of the things of our sinful nature is that we're very, we're prejudiced people. And often we don't realize how prejudiced we are. Prejudice in a Christian is not a good thing. If you are prejudiced against people, it is not a good thing. It is not good because we can never hear anything good. Say, for instance, somebody is prejudiced against a particular minister. You will never hear anything good from him. It was the same way with the Pharisees and with the Sadducees and with all the religious leaders and the chief priests. They couldn't hear anything good from Jesus because they were prejudiced against him. Nobody preached the truth like Jesus. Nobody spoke the truth with the authority of Christ. Nobody ever spoke truth, in absolute truth, in absolute truth the way that Jesus did. And yet they said he was a liar. That's what prejudice does. It cannot accept the truth. It distorts the way we look at things, distorts the way we think. And Peter was prejudiced. He was prejudiced. He had this inbuilt prejudice against anybody and everybody who wasn't a Jew. And that was something that God was going to have to break in the early church. And that was a massive undertaking as far as from a human point of view. And that's what we find that God is doing in this particular chapter with Peter. And we find often that the Lord works like this. Here he's working in two men. He's working in Cornelius and he's working in Peter. And it's all in one way, in one sense, the same kind of experience, but it's worked out in different ways. And that's how God works. You know, when we come in to worship and come into church, God will work in different ways through the same thing. One person might come in and be really encouraged in the faith. Another person might come in and be rebuked. Another person might be humbled. Another person might come to faith. See, God's working and God's Spirit is working. God's Spirit is ministering the Word. That's why we come. That's why preaching is so important. That's why the whole New Testament church, we find that it flourishes through preaching. And if we ever lose sight of the importance of preaching, then we've lost sight biblically of what God has set out before us. That faith comes through the reading and through the preaching of the Word. And so we find that in the New Testament church, there was so much emphasis put upon the preaching of

the Word. And we underestimate what goes on.

[12:18] But when we put ourselves under the Word, God works in people's lives. And so we find that as Peter comes to visit Cornelius, that Cornelius bows down before him to worship him. And of course, Peter is rightly horrified and he says to him, come on, get up! Because we've got to remember that no passion must ever, ever be worshipped. God alone is deserving of worship. Now, of course, men and women can be praised, and men and women, of course, can be respected. And there's lots of things that we can do with regard to people. And we can, as we say, really praise people and respect people and acknowledge the goodness and the greatness that's within people. But we must never, ever give people worship. No passion, no anything must be worshipped apart from God alone. And so, as we say, the Lord is at work here in the life of both Peter and Cornelius. Now, we find that here that when Peter comes to Cornelius, that here is this man, and he understands, there's a lot he has come to understand. But there are still things that he hasn't come to understand.

And one of the things that Peter does when he comes is he preaches about what Jesus has done. And the bottom line is that Peter shows how important it is for our passion to come to faith in Jesus Christ. As Jesus said to Nicodemus, who came to him by night, you must be born again. And it doesn't matter how good or how noble or how winsome or how right or how decent a person is, how morally upstanding, how decent a citizen, how good a parent or how virtuous they might be in their life, the bottom line is you must be born again. And Jesus didn't say to Nicodemus, Nicodemus, you're doing well. You're nearly there. Just keep going. Sort out one or two things in your life. No, he said, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. That's it.

And that is why it doesn't matter. We must never lean upon our own righteousness, our own goodness, our own virtues, our own anything. The rich young ruler was a man whose life was impeccable.

If you were to view his outward life, you would say, out of 10, that man scores 10 out of 10. His life was a life of absolute moral goodness and uprightness and virtue. And people would say, see that rich young ruler? Can't find anything wrong with him. Because when Jesus spoke to him about the commandments, he rattled them off and he said, all these have I kept. And you'd say to yourself, wow. But Jesus hid straight home. And this man, like everybody else, was full of failure and full of sin. And his big problem was that he was worshiping the wrong thing. He thought he was following God. He thought he was worshiping God, but Jesus knew he wasn't. Jesus knew he was worshiping his money. And he said, go and sell what you have. Then come and follow me. Man went away, sorrowful. And now Jesus is not saying to us the way for discipleship is get rid of all your money and get rid of everything. That's not what he's saying. But for this young man, the problem for him was his worship was directed in the wrong way. He thought it was okay. He thought he was doing good.

[16:19] And so the bottom line for all of us is, you must be born again. And so Cornelius is going to be taught by Peter. And Peter, of course, summarizes the life of Jesus. And he was showing how important the Word of God is and how the prophets bore testimony to the life of Jesus. And of course, the prophets are full of Christ. When you study the Bible, it shows to us, if you go through the Bible, the prophets told where Jesus was to be born. They told the kind of life he was to live.

They told the kind of ministry he was to have. They told about how he was to be betrayed. They even told what he was to be sold for. They told the kind of death he was to die, that he was even going to be put to death amongst criminals. The prophecies are full of Jesus Christ. Even the life of Jonah, one of the prophets, what happened to him, the way his life was lived, and remember how he was swallowed by the great fish, even that was symbolic of Jesus' burial and subsequent resurrection.

And so, Peter is homing in on the fact that all of us, all of us need Jesus, because we read these wonderful words about how we have to have the...we read where he sings, so Peter opened his mouth and he said to ask for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace, and so on, that...and we are witnesses of all that he did, both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem and such like. And then he goes on to say, and 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 of the dead.

To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. And that, my friends, is what we all need, the forgiveness of our sin.

Because we've all sinned and come short of the glory of God. And one sin, you know, one sin is sufficient to condemn us. And every...there isn't one person anywhere that can put their hand up and say, I've never sinned, I've never done wrong. We've all sinned, and we've all come short of the glory of God.

[18 : 58] And it is because of our own total incapacity to sort ourselves out and to make ourselves right with God that Jesus came into this world. And he came in order that we might know that forgiveness of sin.

What a healing balm there is. All of you tonight who have experienced the joy of coming to faith in Jesus Christ, who know...now, I know that there are some people, and they've come to faith so gently, and they've come to faith so young in their lives, that they've never had a profound conversion experience in the sense of being somebody who has lived their life in one particular way.

And then where God's transforming work has so changed their life that it's 100% obvious to them and to others what's taken place. But there are many people who have come to faith so gradually, and so gently, and have come into faith so young, that they spend their life looking and longing, and waiting for this. I was speaking to somebody recently, and that's the very thing that he was saying. An old man, a very old man who's been a Christian for years and years and years and years, and he was saying, I wish that I had had the kind of life where there was a clear cutoff, a clear demarcation point where I could know. But from an early age, I've always believed, I've always followed. My desire has always been for the Lord. And now, in my older years, I'm now beginning sometimes to question and to wonder, was I ever saved? Where has that point been?

But the thing is, as we go back, as we mentioned earlier, that very point, that very thing where you are deciding the Lord is an evidence of God in your heart and in your life.

But you see, it's such that we all need this forgiveness of sin. And as I was saying just before I mentioned that, for those who have that clear point, that clear mark, where they know so clearly they've passed from death to life, and where they're aware of the liberty that has come from having had their sins forgiven. There's nothing like it in life. Where you're aware of this forgiveness, where you were in darkness, and then you were brought into light. Where you were in the despair of death, and all you were brought into the light of life. It's wonderful, the joy that is in one's heart.

[21 : 59] And so, this forgiveness of sin is so essential. And so, everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sin. We mentioned that believing this morning, to believe in all that Jesus is in His person, and to believe in everything that He did in His work. And that belief means resting your life, that you're giving your whole life, and you're saying, well, Lord, look, I can't do anything about this myself. Take my life, Lord, my heart, my everything. I give it all to You. That's what it is, putting our trust in the Lord to do for us what we cannot do ourselves. And then, as Peter is preaching, something wonderful happened. And it's not the first time that Peter was kind of stopped in his tracks. While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the Word.

And they were all amazed, all those who came with Peter. It's like Peter was stopped, and here's the Holy Spirit coming in power. There was a clear manifestation. Now, of course, it's always the Holy Spirit applying the Word that brings faith into a person's heart, where the Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ into our soul. But the Holy Spirit moves so gently, so quietly, that we are not aware of what is happening. But here, there was this real outward manifestation. It was like a little Pentecost.

That's what was happening. Remember back in Acts chapter 2, where there was this, where the Holy Spirit came with this incredible display of power. Well, here we have, as it were, like a little Pentecost.

And we find here that the Jews who came with Peter, they were amazed, because it tells us here, and it says, for they were hearing them speak in tongues and extolling God. Two things happened as the Holy Spirit came. First of all, they were praising God. They were worshiping God. They were extolling God. Worship is giving the greatest worth that you can to someone or to something.

The greatest value. We were talking about worshiping just a moment ago. Everybody worships somebody or something. It's what, really in a sense, it's not, when we talk about worship, we often think of what we're doing here. We've come to worship God. And we think of our hour of worship, and we confine it to this little while, and we say, well, that's my worship over. No, our life is worship. And we're worshiping someone or something. Someone is at the heart of our life. Whatever is at the heart of our life, that is what we worship above all. Now, I hope that it's God we worship. But you

know, there are lots of things we can worship. People can worship fame. They can worship wealth. They can worship power. In other words, people who want, it's power they want. Whatever power they have in life, they want more. And they will do whatever they can to get more power and more influence over other people's lives. And it doesn't matter what it's going to cost or who has to be trampled on. They've got to get more power. That's what motivates them. What makes you tick in life? What is at the heart of your life? Who is at the heart of your life? It's a very important question. Because the one who is at the heart of your life, or what is at the heart of your life, is really you. That's what you worship.

[26 : 01] And if we worship anybody or anything other than God, we are guilty of idolatry. And the bottom line really is that we cannot change. We cannot change unless we're given something or someone else to worship. And that's what happens in conversion. When a person is converted, a change takes place. And we're brought to worship someone else. God takes center spot.

everything changes. And your life, and that's what happens, that's really what happens in the Christian life. Jesus said to his disciples, you call me Lord. And that exactly is it, where he exercises lordship, authority over their lives. Does Jesus exercise lordship over your life? Is he king of your heart? Is he the one that you submit to and you say, Lord, in all the areas of my life, I want you to be king? In my relationships, in the home, in my work, in my leisure, when I go to bed, when I get up, Lord, I want you to be king. Is he the one who motivates your life? If so, then you are worshipping him. Your life is a life of worship to the king. If not, then you need this radical change. You need to be changed within so that you will come to live a life where you're praising God, where you're worshipping God. And the second thing we see, and with this we conclude, we find that they were speaking in tongues. And we have to ask ourselves, is this speaking of tongues always evidence of the Spirit present? Well, no, because we read of lots of instances in the Scripture where people came to faith in Jesus Christ, and there wasn't this speaking in tongues. But Peter, in chapter 11, when he's giving an account of this, he says, as they began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And that, of course, the beginning means a Pentecost. So here, as we said, is this little Pentecost. And this amazing thing is where they began to speak in tongues. Now, I have never heard in anybody, now there might be people here who have, I have no idea. But my understanding, I've never heard anybody speak in tongues, but my understanding of this, and I might be totally wrong, but I think the first time when the Spirit came at Pentecost in power, and remember there was a huge crowd before Peter, and they were from all different places, that they were able, each person, it tells us, was hearing the gospel in his own tongue. So that the word was being preached in different tongues, in different languages, people were hearing in their own language. And I think the Lord is showing us here that in the kingdom of God, this is one of the things that he's doing. He's breaking down all the barriers of race and gender and all these things, and that there isn't one language that is greater than another, that the Jew had huge problems thinking they were superior. And the Lord is saying, you're not, there's no superiors and inferiors. All are one in Jesus Christ. And that the God, remember, is not a God of confusion. And he doesn't bring confusion into his church. We can bring confusion into the church. The Lord doesn't. The Lord is in the business of building up, of uniting. This is a great work. You go through the New Testament church, and it's all preachers. Paul is forever preaching about church unity, of bringing together, of uniting together, not confusion. And if people are speaking in all kinds of different languages, then it will be confusion. That's what happened at Babel, where the Lord wanted to scatter the people. It's a bringing together. And so people were able to hear and understand the gospel in their own language. That's how it's got to be.

The word has to be so that we will understand it, made accessible to us. But the important thing is that God's Spirit came upon them. Wouldn't it be one...that's what I would love to see, is a great manifestation of God's power and God's Spirit. I know some of the older people here have been in a revival. I've never been in a revival situation or a period of revival blessing, and it must be wonderful. And I'm sure we're praying again that we might see that. God coming in power, changing many lives, many lives being turned right round.

But you know, at one sense, every soul being saved, it's a miracle. Every soul being saved, in a way, is a revival. Every single soul is precious. You need God's Spirit to touch your heart tonight.

[31 : 48] Ask Him, Lord, touch my heart. Open my heart to receive Jesus. Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.