

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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**NOT GOOD ENOUGH**

Acts 10:1-23

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There are three points to today's message:

- Cornelius was a good man.
- Peter was a good man.
- Being good wasn't good enough.

**CORNELIUS WAS A GOOD MAN.**

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 10:1-8

*At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. <sup>2</sup> He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. <sup>3</sup> One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" <sup>4</sup> Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. <sup>5</sup> Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. <sup>6</sup> He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea." <sup>7</sup> When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. <sup>8</sup> He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.*

**EXPLANATION:** Cornelius was a Roman soldier who was in charge of 100 men. A centurion once asked Jesus to heal his servant. Jesus praised that centurion's faith. Cornelius was also a man of great faith, a man who had learned about the God of the Hebrews and had chosen to follow him. The word "devout" means "deeply religious." So, Cornelius was serious about his faith. He not only respected God, he also prayed to him and tried to honor him with his generosity.

We don't know what the centurion prayed for, but it's interesting that the Bible refers to his prayers and gifts as a memorial offering. A memorial offering was a grain offering that was given as a demonstration of gratitude, devotion, and praise. The Bible repeatedly refers to a memorial offering as an aroma that is pleasing to the Lord. It is an offering that helps the giver remember the Lord and helps the Lord to take notice of the giver. Cornelius probably had little knowledge of any of this. But still Cornelius gave what he had—his time, his devotion, his money, his prayers—and God accepted them as a memorial offering.

- God saw Cornelius.
- God heard Cornelius.
- God responded to Cornelius's heart cry.

**ILLUSTRATION:** There is a song that is sung by a Canadian country music band. Part of the lyrics say:

I wanna be the one when all is said and done  
Who lived a good life, loved a good wife, and always helped someone in trouble.  
On the day they lay me down, I want everyone to gather 'round  
And say he was a father, brother, neighbor and a friend.  
He was a good man!

I think most of us would agree with that sentiment. We want to be good men. We want to be good women. One day, a teacher went around the class asking the students what they wanted to be when they grew up. When the teacher got to the little boy whose last name was Robert, he said, "I want to be a robber!" And everyone laughed. I don't know what happened to that little boy, but I'm sure his intention that day was more about being the class clown than living a life of crime. I'm not sure anyone grows up thinking, "I want to be bad." Most, if not all, want to be good.

So, God sent an angel to give Cornelius a message, and Cornelius obeyed. Because although he was a Gentile, **Cornelius was a good man.**

**PETER WAS A GOOD MAN.**

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 10:9-16

*About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. <sup>10</sup> He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. <sup>11</sup> He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. <sup>12</sup> It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. <sup>13</sup> Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” <sup>14</sup> “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” <sup>15</sup> The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” <sup>16</sup> This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.*

**EXPLANATION:** As I mentioned in a previous sermon, Peter was in Joppa staying with a tanner. Because tanners dealt with dead animals, it was considered an undesirable profession for Jews. So, it’s possible that Simon the Tanner was a Gentile. Whether a Jew or a Gentile, a tanner would always be considered spiritually unclean. Because Peter was staying with a tanner, we see that God had already begun working on Peter’s heart. God was asking Peter to move out of his comfort zone, to go wherever the Lord directed and speak to whomever God instructed. It seemed, however, that Peter wasn’t quite “there” yet. It would be hard to break years of training and indoctrination about spiritual matters. It was going to be hard to get past all the rules and regulations that he had been taught to obey.

God decided to start with something very physical, very primal—the desire for food. Remember, Old Testament law was very concerned about the outside of the body as well as the inside. Jews believed that what they touched, who they hung around with, and what they ate affected the condition of their souls. Therefore, something considered “dirty” on the outside had the potential to make one dirty on the inside too. Scripture defined what was considered clean and unclean, what could be eaten and what had to be avoided. The religious authorities of the day took this to the extreme. Therefore, Peter had been raised with strict rules about what he could and could not eat, as well as who he could and could not eat with.

I want you to think about this for a moment. Peter was raised in a Jewish home with all those strict rules regarding food and cleanliness and other health matters. It seems very complicated to us, but if you grew up that way it would be merely second nature. Many of those rules were actually laws that were called the Law of

Moses and are spelled out in the Old Testament. Many of the rules were add-ons by people through the years.

Right here in the book of Acts, we read what Peter and the disciples were doing after Jesus ascended into heaven. But prior to that, Peter had been with Jesus. Jesus brought a new covenant. He brought a new way of thinking. The way to salvation was not through following rules and sacrificing animals for the remission of sins, but through trust in Jesus, and trusting as the one-time sacrifice for the remission of sins.

Peter had been with Jesus when he broke the Sabbath law by healing someone on the Sabbath and by plucking a cob of corn from a stalk. But Peter was apparently still hanging on to the old ways.

God wanted to teach Peter an important lesson. He wanted to make one more major change in the way Peter thought about his faith. But it wasn't going to be easy. God was telling Peter to disregard those old rules about dietary restrictions, the rules his parents had taught him, the rules his grandparents had modeled, the rules that he'd heard from priests and that were lived out by saintly heroes. Most interestingly, was the fact that the lesson, while it appeared to be all about food, wasn't really about food at all.

**ILLUSTRATION:** A father wanted to have a serious talk with his daughter about dating. He sensed that she would be reluctant to engage in a conversation with him, so he thought of a creative way to do it. He asked her to take a ride in the car with him as he headed to the store. Once they got out of the driveway, the father dropped his speed to about 5 miles an hour and inched slowly along as he talked to his daughter about the potential dangers of dating. The father kept his eyes trained on the road as he spoke. The daughter stared straight ahead. When the father finished giving his speech, he pressed down on the accelerator and finished his errand. They never mentioned the topic again, but the father made his point. Sometimes difficult lessons have to be taught in creative ways.

**EXPLANATION:** God wanted to make one more major change in the way Peter thought about his faith, so being the creative God he is, he caused Peter to have a vision.

Please note:

- He came to Peter after Peter's heart had already been softened.
- He came to Peter when Peter was hungry and therefore more vulnerable.
- He came to Peter using an image that Peter would understand.

Peter was an earthy, rugged man. He was an outdoorsman, someone who wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty. Think about all the ways in which animals were present in Peter's life and ministry.

- Peter was a fisherman by trade.
- Once Jesus told him to find tax money inside the mouth of a fish.
- Peter was called to be a fisher of men.
- Peter's denials were marked by the crowing of a rooster.
- Jesus told Peter to feed his sheep.
- Peter was staying in the home of a man who tanned animal hides.

God knew this was going to be a tough lesson for Peter. So, he used a unique method with familiar images to present a difficult message. He dropped a net full of animals and told Peter to eat.

There was just one problem. The net was full of clean and unclean animals. Even the clean animals were tainted because they were piled up with the unclean.

- Peter wanted to follow God.
- Peter was determined to live a Godly life.
- Peter was set on following God's rules.
- So, there was no way that Peter was going to eat those animals, because **Peter was a good man.**

**Cornelius was a good man, and Peter was a good man, but...**

## **BEING GOOD ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH**

**SCRIPTURE** Acts 10:17-22

*While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. <sup>18</sup> They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there. <sup>19</sup> While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men*

are looking for you. <sup>20</sup> So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.” <sup>21</sup> Peter went down and said to the men, “I’m the one you’re looking for. Why have you come?” <sup>22</sup> The men replied, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.”

**EXPLANATION** - Bless Peter’s heart. He was never much for subtlety. As he sat mulling over the vision God had given him, Cornelius’s men arrived. The scripture says that they stopped at the gate and called out. They probably saw Peter up there on the roof, but Peter didn’t seem to hear them yelling up to him. Instead, God had to give him a nudge. “Peter, there are men looking for you. Go with them.” Those men were Gentiles, and just like Peter had always been taught to avoid certain foods, he’d also been taught to avoid Gentiles. But God was telling him to go, and so, Peter obeyed. I think Peter was probably still a little confused.

Cornelius was a good man, and Peter was a good man, but being good wasn’t good enough.

God had more for Cornelius and for Peter.

- More for them to experience.
- More for them to do.
- More of himself to reveal.

**APPLICATION:** What about you? Are you a good person? Maybe you’re like Peter. Maybe you are a good person who knows Jesus. Guess what? Your goodness is still not enough. God doesn’t want you to be secure in knowledge alone. God still has more for you to learn, more for you to do, more of himself for you to experience. The Bible tells us that we are to keep growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus and his Word. It tells us to finish the race well.

But maybe, just maybe, you are like Cornelius. Do you believe in God? Do you pray and try to follow the rules? Maybe you’re even nice to your neighbor and put a few dollars in the offering plate. Can I just tell you today that your goodness is not enough?

**CONCLUSION:** The Bible tells us that no one is righteous.

Romans 3:10-11 — *As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; <sup>11</sup> there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.*

That means no one has right-standing with God.

The Bible tells that no one is saved by doing good deeds.

Ephesians 2:8-9 — *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.*

If you don’t know Jesus personally, then all your goodness still won’t get you into Heaven. It still won’t connect you in a sincere relationship with the Father.

Romans 10:9-10 says — *“If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”*

Being good isn’t good enough; salvation is only through Jesus.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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