

"MISSIONS"

Acts 10

When you hear the word "Missions" what comes to your mind? Do you think of some far-off, distant place, somewhere over there, in some remote part of deepest, darkest Africa? Maybe you think of a missionary who you heard about long ago who was called to work on one of the Indian reservations out in Arizona. Or maybe it is when our youth come back from their summer mission trips and they stand in front of the congregation and share of their experiences? When you think of the Church of Jesus Christ does "Missions" come to mind or only when we see the names of the missionaries in our Sunday bulletin, those we support through our mission dollars? Do you ever consider a church a "Mission Church" or a mission-minded church?

As some of you know, my wife was born and raised on the mission field, in Pakistan to be exact.

Her father had been over there before he went to seminary, he returned to the states, got his seminary training, got married and then took his bride to Pakistan where they raised their three children and only returned home for good when the kids were going into 11th, 10th and 9th grade. Missions have been an integral part of her life and mine as we met at the New Wilmington Mission Conference years ago. Some people might think that being a missionary is glamorous work- being in some exotic land, in a different culture. But it can be far from glamorous. It can be downright heart wrenching, it can be dangerous, it can be discouraging and, so as not to give you the impression that there is no joy, it can be rewarding in ways that you cannot even imagine. My wife could share story after story about the joys.

Today we continue our study of Christian Disciplines and in particular, Missions. Those who continue to be engaged in our Wednesday Bible Studies and are looking at the Christian Disciplines would have read the following words in their study book entitled, *Christian Disciplines*, by

Andrea Sterk & Peter Scazzero. It says, "Missions is a major theme of the Bible, running from Genesis to Revelation. The desire to see the gospel penetrate every culture and nations is at the very heart of God. Yet there is a tendency in our churches and personal lives to place it at the bottom of our agenda, especially when other concerns press upon our already overcrowded schedule." (End quote) Not that we, ourselves have to sign up for the mission field, wherever that mission field might be. But do we have a concern for mission; do we have an open heart for missions? Maybe this concern, this open heart finds us praying weekly for the mission causes and the missionaries that are printed each week in the Sunday bulletin. Maybe it is becoming involved with Compassion International- maybe it is you, personally sponsoring a child or maybe it is a Sunday school class sponsoring a child or a few of you going together to sponsor a child. Maybe it is going on the next Adult Mission trip that is offered- we have already

gone to Sitka, Alaska and to Gulfport, Mississippi so maybe there is another one down the road.

This morning I want to hold up the topic of missions, and hopefully sensitize us to missions so that, even if we do not currently engage in Missions, and believe me, there are plenty of opportunities in Akron and right here at our church, we can think of ways we can get involved and make a difference for Christ. To do so, let's look at our passage today from Acts 10.

This 10th chapter of Acts gives us a situation that is **one of the great turning points in the history of the Church**. Why, you ask? Well, for the first time a Gentile, a man who was a Roman, Cornelius, who happened to be a centurion of the Italian Cohort, is welcomed into the fellowship. You see, from the get-go, God had entered into a special relationship with the people of Israel. He had called them to be His people, to be His witnesses, and yes, His missionaries to the world.

But along the way things got mixed up- they had forgotten their purpose and instead of being a light to the rest of the world and invite them into the fold they set up roadblocks, barriers, if you will, and saw that this faith was for them and them alone. It wasn't until Jesus came on the scene that some of these barriers were brought down- like dealing with women, for Jesus reached out to woman, why, He spoke to women when any fine, upstanding Rabbi would look the other way. And there was reaching out to the Samaritans, and the healing of the Gentile Roman centurion's slave. So in our passage we have a good Jew, Peter, who knows what is the protocol, he knows he is not to have anything to do with those Gentiles, those non-Jews, and this mindset carried over into the early church. So unless something changed, unless something happened, the Gentiles, you and me, would have been left out. How did the church come to this point where insiders were willing to include outsiders? It started in Jerusalem as the good news of Christ was taken to Samaria, and then, there was the conversion of the

Ethiopian, and on to the ends of the earth. And then, miracles of miracles, there is this guy named Saul who was a persecutor of the early Christians, he has this road to Damascus experience where he accepts Christ as Messiah and becomes known as Paul, one of God's messengers. So what will happen next? That is where the story of Cornelius and Peter comes in. Peter's views had been softening towards the Gentiles, as we will soon see. So let's look as this drama unfolds in 6 scenes.

SCENE ONE- Read verses 1-8. Here we have a Gentile, who happens to be a Roman who is an officer. He also is a "a devout man who feared God..., who gave alms..., who prayed constantly to God." (Verse 2) So here is a man who is right there at the doorstep of the community but is still an outsider. He obviously is open and teachable to the things of God. There is a foundation to build upon with this man, he is open and so God gives him a vision.

SCENE TWO- Read verses 9-16. There is this vision of an angel and the angel has a message- send men to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter.

Where is Peter, and again, who is he with? He is in Joppa and he is praying on the roof of the home of a man called Simon who happens to be a tanner

by trade. Remember earlier I said that Peter's views were starting to

soften? Well here is this upright Jew who is staying with a new believer

named Simon who is a tanner. Think about it- an orthodox Jew (that's

Peter) was not allowed to have any dealings with anyone who worked with

dead animals. That is the reason why tanners had to live 50 cubits outside a

village. But wait- there is something different about Simon- he is a tanner

who is a believer in Jesus, and he has become Peter's friend in spite of the

religious regulations. Peter is on the way to being set free of the petty

religious laws and taboos because Christ sets us free and Christianity

abolishes those laws and taboos.

So Peter is on the roof praying and it is his turn for a vision- Peter is hungry and he goes into a trance and he sees a large sheet being lowered and it contains, heaven forbid, all animals, except for fish. He is told to get up, kill and eat. This happens three times, but Peter shows his commitment and loyalty to the sacred Jewish dietary laws and says NO. You see, this was but one of a number of things that could not be tolerated- a little bit of pork here or a little bit of intermarriage there was a matter of life and death for the Jewish community, this was a survival issue. But could there be another way? Peter is confused.

SCENE THREE- Read verses 17-23a. In this scene Cornelius sends a messenger looking specifically for Simon Peter, not Simon the tanner. The Spirit of God tells him to go with the 3 messengers, which he does because, even though he is confused, Peter trusts the Spirit of God and that he, God, knows better. You see that is the mark of a follower of Jesus- trusting the Lord even when it doesn't look to clear.

SCENE FOUR- Read verses 23b-33. Now the scene shifts to Caesarea and Cornelius' house. We hear from both Peter and Cornelius and we read of the conversion of not one but two men: The conversion of a Gentile who comes to know Christ and the conversion of an Apostle who welcomes a Gentile into the early church. You see, if God's mission is going to go forward then the conversion of both of these men is crucial. Peter speaks to not only Cornelius but to the many who had gathered at his home and confesses that he has broken with Jewish law only because God has corrected his understanding of clean and unclean. Peter says in verse 28, "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean." The confusion of his vision in verses 9-16 is now resolved. The issue was not if a person was a Jew or a Gentile but if they, as Peter says in verse 43, "believe in him," meaning Jesus Christ. The community, the fellowship is getting bigger.

SCENE FIVE- Read verses 34-43. Peter preaches a sermon and he begins in verses 34-35, "I understand that **God shows no partiality**, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." No partiality. As a result of this conversion of both men, old divisions are brought down and two peoples who were once at odds- Jew and Gentile- declare their oneness in Christ and spend time with each other in a home that, previously, was off limits. The walls have come down between Jews and Gentiles because of Jesus Christ and what He did on that cross for everyone, everyone. And Peter puts an exclamation point on his sermon when he says in verse 36 that Jesus is, "Lord of all." This word from Peter turned the Palestinian world upside down- it was mindboggling. Can you get the picture how upsetting this would be to some, how exciting it would be to others? It would turn people's worlds inside out to those whose faith was based upon the ideas of partiality, who had suffered in spite of and because of this partiality and yet still believed?

Folks, when you read the book of Acts you see a step by step progression of the Gospel of Christ going out from Jerusalem to Samaria, and now to Joppa, beyond the conversion of Samaritans and an Ethiopian, to the point that the write of Acts, Luke, has now brought us to a Roman soldier who believes in Jesus. And so the full extent of the Gospel is brought home. Everyone is invited, and don't think for a moment that those who went with Peter to Caesarea were not blown away and trying to figure it all out. Surprise, surprise.

AND OUR FINAL SCENE SIX- Read verses 44-48. If there was any doubt about Peter's vision of impartiality it is laid to rest when the Holy Spirit comes into Cornelius and his relatives which only confirms what Peter is saying- that God is the one behind all of this. And any potential issues concerning the baptism of Gentiles are cleared up, for who in their right mind could forbid baptism after the Holy Spirit is already with these people,

verse 47? So they are all baptized and brought into the church that welcomed Jews who accepted Jesus and Gentiles who did likewise.

Today's spiritual discipline is Missions. Will you ever go into the mission field- maybe, maybe not? There are ways you can get involved- Compassion Sunday gives you the opportunity. You can support missions through your prayers, your money, and yes, if the opportunity presents itself, you could go on a short-term mission trip and experience it first hand- like the youth do each summer, like the adults have done in recent years. Friends, you don't have to go to Africa to become engaged in missions. There are plenty of ways, why, missions is right outside this church door and in our neighborhoods. As Christians we have a responsibility to support missions in our neighborhood, our city, our state, our country. Why the world is our mission field. What can you do to become personally involved in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ? Amen.

"MISSIONS"

Acts 10

Introduction: When you hear the word MISSIONS what comes to mind?

"... yet there is a tendency in our churches and personal lives to place it [missions] at the bottom of our agenda,...."

Sensitizing us to missions...

Acts 10- one of the greatest _____ points in the history of the Church- Why?

How did the church come to the point where insiders were willing to include outsiders?

Scene One- vs. 1-8

A Gentile...

Scene Two- vs. 9-16

Simon the tanner's home

Peter softening?

Peter's vision...

Scene Three- vs. 17-23a**Scene Four- vs. 23b-33**

The conversion of not one but two men...

Scene Five- vs. 34-43

Peter's sermon

God shows no _____ vs. 34

Scene Six- vs. 44-44

No doubt...

Conclusion: What can you do to become personally involved in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ?