

**Follow whom to Speak to – Overcoming being Overwhelmed  
Acts 10 (Summarized in Acts 11)**

Brothers and sisters in Christ – or should I say fellow gentiles who have been granted the repentance unto life by God...

How do you feel – especially if you have any Italian background in you – that the early church in Jerusalem was quite upset with the Apostle Peter for going and having Christian fellowship with “*an uncircumcised man*” who was a Roman centurion from the Italian Regiment?

In fact it was a bit more than Christian fellowship; Peter had gone to minister to a Roman Centurion, a God-fearing man named Cornelius who had received a vision from an angel telling him to send for the apostle Peter.

Now you can find all these kinds of details about this story - and I will be referring to a number of them this morning - from the forty eight verses in Acts chapter 10.

In the interests of time we read about this story from Acts 11 this morning, because it succinctly summarizes all the story of Cornelius and Peter in a much more manageable eighteen verses.

So this visit - as we heard - resulted in the Holy Spirit being poured out upon Cornelius and all who had gathered together in his house to hear Peter speak.

But how do you feel knowing that the early Jerusalem church was a bit put out and offended and had criticized Peter for having gone out and fellowshiped with the likes of us!?

We might be feeling like “*hey wait a minute... what’s so wrong with us gentiles that you would have a problem with Peter doing this!*”

Especially when Peter’s actions meant that us Gentiles were now receiving and participating in God’s promised blessings to Israel.

And I bring this up because It's good for us to be reminded of what it's like to be the ones on the outside, the ones whom others might raise an eyebrow about – because we are so used to being the ones on the inside and the ones who may do some raising of the eyebrows when we hear about some new and perhaps unconventional ministry efforts to reach out to people who are outside decent society.

Some of you have heard me share the story of how a church fellowship got started in a Gentleman's Club/Hotel that is situated next to the Guelph Bible Conference Center as a result of an interaction that took place when Dunamis Fellowship was running one of its conferences at the Bible Center.

That certainly raised my eyebrows the first time I heard it – but praise God there is a group of people bringing the good news of Jesus out into one of the dark places of the world where it needs to be seen and heard – and as a result not only are people coming to know Jesus but the spiritual interference

and attack of the enemy that used to come from that location during Dunamis Conferences has been significantly decreased.

Now that is a pretty radical example of how Christians can GO OUT in order that the good news of the Kingdom may advance Our opportunity here at Valleyview is far less... controversial than this or what the apostle Peter was called to do.

And over this past month we have been listening to messages that are encouraging us and equipping us to overcome whatever it might be that causes us to resist Going Out and blessing someone in the name of Jesus with \$100 in some way.

We started out by acknowledging that our sinful nature will resist this, we've looked at how being self-centered can prevent us from doing it, and last we've realized that maybe we didn't know that we can invest materially in people's lives in a way that produces spiritual blessings.

And I believe these messages have helped some of us push past our resistance and reluctance to Go Out and bless someone – but... there's still one area of resistance to address.

And that is how we can just get overwhelmed by the prospect of going out and doing this.

There are so many ways we can do this right? Start a pay it forward move at Tim Hortons, go to a car dealership and put down that \$100 for someone who had car repairs go higher than expected, offer to pay for someone's groceries in the store – that it can be overwhelming to determine that exact right thing to do.

We want this to really make a difference and have an impact and we're not certain if the person we bless will really respond in the right way or if they will use the money responsibly or so on and so on – we get overwhelmed and stuck.

Or we might just be overwhelmed with our own lives right now – we're dealing with all sorts of challenges or we're super

busy and we've got lots going on, and the prospect of adding something else on to the to-do list is... overwhelming.

And in many ways that is the kind of position the early church had found itself in as they were reacting to Peter's actions of Going-Out and meeting with this Roman Centurion.

If you have read the first couple chapters of Acts you'll know there was a lot going on for the early church – a lot of good and amazing things were keeping them very busy. Let me just read Acts 2:42-47 to give you the summary of it.

*<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the*

*people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

It was amazing but I'm sure it probably felt a little overwhelming – especially for the apostles and those in leadership.

So as a result, no one was making any plans to GO OUT of Jerusalem to make sure that Jesus' command in Act 1:8 was being fulfilled – *“you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, AND in Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth!”*

So what helped them overcome their resistance to going out? Well before I give you the answer to that let me address the fact that most of us are probably not overwhelmed with good problems these days – but rather with challenging problems. We are in the midst of a global pandemic after all.

So I want you to know I've been wrestling with how to encourage us and motivate us to GO OUT and bless others, not just trying to figure out what will move us to action - but

also with the timing of this project - and I think its helpful to address that this morning.

Because I know that many of us are going through their own personal challenges and struggles right now - illness, looking for work, family challenges and the very fact that going out and connecting with other people is a bit of a risk!

So how can we focus on this project of Going Out into our community at a time like this when people are wrestling and struggling to deal with their own situations? It doesn't seem very pastoral to me, I'd rather just gather everyone in and offer prayer and ministry times until we're all in a better situation and then look at Going Out.

But brothers and sisters in Christ, it was only because of going through hard times that the early Jerusalem Church actually went out – or was forced to GO OUT. In Acts 8:1 we read *“On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.* Exactly were Jesus said to Go

It took the hardship of persecution for them to decided to leave Jerusalem and move out into Judea and Samaria.

That would have been very difficult and hard times – leaving behind your family or friends... some of whom may have turned on you being a Christian and would have assisted in putting you in jail – or even have you killed. Leaving Jerusalem meant leaving behind the life you had built there and starting over somewhere else.

So these early believers were going through hard times, as hard as any that we may be facing today – an yet Acts 8:4 says *“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.”*

And as I reflected on this it struck me that it is precisely when we are going through hard times, of whatever kind, that our testimony and witness to Jesus is most powerful.

You see we often think that what “sells” people on Jesus is how He can make our life better now... in this world – by

giving us healing, deliverance, provision and solving our immediate problems and so on... but those who really encounter the person of Jesus in how he stoops to meet us where we are at – come to realize Jesus’ ministry to us points ahead, past our problems, to what is promised to come.

They truly grasp the HOPE of the return of Christ, they know a better day is on the way, and so they can endure and weather the hardships of this life because of the promise, the reality of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting! Amen.

Now I won’t deny the reality that the hardships we encounter in this life are difficult, they can be gut wrenching and painful and desperate – that is true... but we can’t we let the experience of those hardships deny the greater reality and truth of the promise that there is a better life coming when Christ returns.

No sickness, no death, no pain, no war, no persecution, no climate change... no more left or right... no more sin and evil,

just a renewed heavens and earth and an eternity spent in relationship and worship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

You see friends -when we **know** and believe and trust that this life is not all that there is, we have a hope that takes us through hard times, and we can share that hope with other people - our circumstances make it powerful!

People can't deny the power of that hope – they may not understand it, comprehend it, because their hearts are still captive to the illusion that this reality is all there is, and they can't fathom how they will function if that were to fall apart on them somehow...

But sharing Jesus when we are in times of hardship shows that the pursuit of “the good life” has no power over us, Jesus does instead and we have the solid, concrete, rock solid promise of an everlasting and eternal life – so when the good life isn't so good we are not swept away.

And we can overcome being overwhelmed.

Remember what our Lord said in John 16:33 – and it is why I have spent so much time reminding us of it this morning... *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

Now don't misunderstand – I'm not minimizing our hardships! What I'm saying is that however much you are engaged in the hardships and struggles of this life – you need to be equally, if not more reminded and encouraged of the reality that there is a better life coming when Jesus returns – because that is part of how Jesus helps us make it through this life.

So – brothers and sisters in Christ, I belabor this point this morning so that we understand how it is that even in the midst of the struggles and the trials of life that we are going through – we can see how it is possible to still GO OUT – and in fact it may be through some of those struggles that the doors to GO OUT open up for us.

So – the early Jerusalem church had been scattered out across Judea and Samaria and the church had spread outside of Jerusalem as a result of that, just as Jesus had desired.

So, brothers and sisters – what else do we find in this story that can help us overcome being overwhelmed by the call to GO OUT into our community to share Jesus?

Well in this story we see God setting up a divine appointment between someone who is seeking God and someone who can reveal more about God to them.

In chapter 10 we are introduced to Cornelius as someone who is *“devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.”* (vs. 2

And brothers and sisters, there are people in our community who because of the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit are searching for God, they are seeking what is right, they want to know their Creator...

Now you might not know about this, you might not see it because it’s not something that people share openly about with just anybody.

But, out there in our neighborhood, behind those nice front doors - there are people who are seeking and searching and looking for something more, they are thirsty for God and God can and will set-up a divine appointment for us to connect with them, just as He did for Peter and Cornelius.

So – you don’t need to be overwhelmed trying to figure out who to Go Out and bless, God has someone in mind for you. The question become then - are we willing to accept an invitation to go out to them?

God invited Peter to go out and speak to Cornelius through a vision about clean and unclean animals – what will God use to invite you to go speak to someone? But before we look at those invitations and accepting them – it’s important to notice the importance of prayer and worship in how God sets up this divine appointment and issues the invitation.

It is noted in 10:3 that Cornelius receives his vision at 3pm in the afternoon – which was one of the regular times set aside for daily prayers and worship of God, and in 10:9-10 we are told that Peter went up on the roof in order to have a quiet place for a time of prayer around noon, and he was probably fasting as well since the scripture notes that he became very hungry.

And it was during this time of prayer and fasting that he went into a trance and received the vision of the sheet with the clean and unclean animals.

So, these divine appointments come out of time spent in intimacy with God through prayer and worship and fasting. Why? Because when we spend time with God in this way we are open to hearing Him speak to us and give us direction.

Now, God gave pretty clear directions to Cornelius; *“send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.”* (10:5)

But not very clear instructions to Peter... in fact the English translation should read *“While Peter was still ‘perplexed or puzzled’ about the vision”* (10:19)

So – sometimes it’s very clear what we need to do, and other times we are going to need to wrestle and contemplate and think about what God is showing us – and be ready to recognize and follow the opportunities the Holy Spirit nudges us towards when they come – for which these vision or pictures have prepared us.

Just like Peter did when the Spirit told him after the vision *“there are three men looking for you – go with them.”* (10:19-20) and then realized what his vision was about when he arrived to minister to a gentile household.

Brothers and sisters, if you are stuck or still reluctant about going out and blessing someone – let me encourage you to spend more time in prayer and worship, and perhaps fasting, so that you are open to listening for instructions about whom God will call you to go out and speak to.



Now let me tell you we received our own vision at Valleyview back in 2017 when we hosted a Dunamis Ignite Conference here. And after spending time in prayer and worship and teaching – we received a scripture passage from Isaiah 43:19 *“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”* (which incidentally I also happened to pick for reading during our praise songs this morning)

And someone received an image as well, a vision, of our church with openings into our surrounding community, and water was flowing into our church and then out into the community through those openings to bless the community.

Now we didn’t know exactly what this vision of waters flowing out to bless the community meant for Valleyview back then – but we do now don’t we!

So brothers and sisters - I want to encourage you to spend time in prayer and worship, even fasting – and ask the Holy

Spirit to reveal to us a particular person that He has set up a divine appointment for us to connect with, to bless them!

Because there are many many people outside of the Church that are seeking God and God wants to reveal Himself to them through Jesus – and He will use us to do that – just as He used Peter.

But what if the Holy Spirit shows us something or someone that we are reluctant about?

That’s a major part of this story, and we already know that we are reluctant to GO OUT because we are used to people COMING HERE, but brothers and sisters – God is allowing us to go through circumstances right now where people are not going to come here for a while – we need to Go Out.

And to do that we have to respond to invitations God issues to us – maybe you will be nudged to speak to someone while out on a walk? Maybe it will be someone at the grocery store? Maybe it is a co-worker?

Brothers and sisters, if you spend time in prayer and worship and ask God to give you invitations – I guarantee that they will start to come and the Holy Spirit is going to nudge to you walk into them.

And if we are still reluctant... even after God has helped us overcome being overwhelmed – then let us look to the example of Cornelius – and his willingness to obey.

You see Cornelius was a Roman soldier, and he understood what it meant to receive orders, and to obey them and to go – regardless of how he felt about it.

So, when God told him to send for Peter - he sent his soldiers to go and get Peter, and then he gathered all his family and relatives together, and he was ready to obey whatever Peter was going to tell him.

And that's really the whole issue for us here isn't it. It really boils down to obedience to Jesus instruction to us to Go Out.

It's not really whether people are interested in God or seeking him – the Holy Spirit can draw people as He did Cornelius.

It's not about whether God will actually tell us who we need to GO OUT to and give us the direction we need for that – God wants to speak to us about it and He will.

It's not even about whether we have all our stuff together, or that we're in a good place in life or going through struggles and hard times – that actually only increases the power of our blessing and the witness and sharing.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it all boils down to whether or not we will obey and follow the Holy Spirit when He gives us the invitation to speak to someone and says "GO"

Brothers and sisters remember what our Lord Jesus said... "If you love me, you will keep my commands" (John 14:15)

So then Let us obey the nudge of His Spirit and follow whom to speak to – and bless them in Jesus name! Amen.