



The Scope of the Mission: Upright Men Need a Savior

Behold Our God – Read the Bible for Life Series #48

Acts 10-11

Pastor David Sunday

October 7, 2012

Our everlasting, never-failing God, we put our hope in You. As we've offered these gifts, we acknowledge that all we have and all we are is from You, God. Riches come and go but our hope is in You. Lord, we turn now to Your Word and pray that You would enliven our hope, quicken our consciences and wills to respond in obedience to what You reveal of Yourself and Your will for our lives. We pray that Jesus Christ would be praised and receive greater glory from us as individuals and as a church. *"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of [our] heart[s] be acceptable in your sight, O LORD..."* as aided and empowered by Your Holy Spirit. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please turn in your Bibles to Acts 10. As you're turning there, I'd like to say just a word about where we're heading with our preaching over the next couple of months. I've been working up an intense appetite to begin a new preaching series in November that will take us on a journey with Jesus through the Gospel of Luke. This will be our first time together at New Covenant to walk with Jesus all the way through one of the four Gospels. It's going to be my first time to preach the Gospel of Luke from beginning to end. I'm very excited about this as I anticipate seeing God's Spirit transform our lives through the beauty and power of the gospel.

We will gaze on Jesus—a prolonged gaze at the Friend of Sinners—in His birth, life, teachings, compassion, prayerfulness, dependence on the Spirit, love for the lost, concern for the poor, radical demands, unswerving determination to go to Jerusalem where He will die on the cross for our sins and rise from the dead so His Spirit can be poured out upon His church, that we may be His witnesses to all the nations. My prayer is that Luke will be like a stick of dynamite that ignites an explosion of passion for Christ and for His Kingdom.

I'm also grateful for the journey we've been on these last 14 months as we've been reading through the whole Bible together. For those of you who have gone through that whole journey to read the Scriptures or have joined us at one point along the way, I'm sure

you would agree that it's been a profitable time as we've read from Genesis to the end. It's so helpful to see Christ in all the Scriptures, God's redeeming plan and the glory of God on display.

We're looking forward to doing that for one more month. As we come close to the end of our journey, we're going through the Book of Acts, the New Testament letters and then the Book of Revelation this month in our Bible readings. The next four Sundays we're going to continue the theme of God's mission in the New Testament because this is such a prominent theme.

Here we are in Acts 10. We find the story of two men: an Italian soldier named Cornelius and the Apostle Peter. These are two men who never would have met one another apart from the sovereign intervention of God. Cornelius is someone who Peter would have passed by on the street, never even considering preaching the gospel to him. In fact, he's someone Peter would have looked down upon. But God isn't going to let Peter off the hook. God's purposes are expanses far beyond Peter's narrow vision. God is going to bring His salvation to all the nations of the earth and He is going to use Peter in the process.

First, God has to tear down some walls of prejudice in Peter's heart. There are probably some walls that need to be torn down in our hearts, too, in order for God's gospel to advance to more and more people through us. Look in your Bibles at Acts 10-11 quickly as we scan the whole story. It's obvious that this is an important story in God's unfolding plan to bring salvation to the nations. We read in Genesis—God's covenant to Abraham—that He would be a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. Then in Galatians, those who share the faith of Abraham share in those blessings. This is a watershed moment in Acts 10-11 because Cornelius represents that breakthrough where the salvation of God is going to reach beyond the Jewish people to all the nations of the world.

It's a very important event in the history of redemption but we need to resist the temptation to treat Bible stories as mere history lessons. It is an important history but it's also God's Living Word for us today. It tests our thoughts and attitudes. As we look at this story of God saving a Gentile named Cornelius, I want us to go through four tests or questions that we need to consider in order to be people God can use to advance His gospel in the 21st Century:

- Is the Gospel necessary?
- Are you eager to share the Gospel with everyone?
- What exactly is the Gospel?
- Is the Gospel enough?

1. Is the Gospel Necessary? — A Test of Our Conviction

First of all, we have a test of our conviction. Is the gospel necessary for everyone to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ and respond to it? Do all peoples need this message? Aren't some people religious enough already? Let's meet Cornelius in Acts 10:1-2.

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God.

Does Cornelius need to hear the gospel? He's an upright man, a fine citizen and God already has an important place in his life. The Bible unashamedly calls Cornelius a God-fearing man. This is surprising considering the fact that Cornelius was a Roman military commander. There probably weren't many God-fearers in that group. His background was pagan but somewhere at some point along the way, he had become disillusioned with the gods of the Romans and attracted toward Judaism, the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. He hadn't gone so far as to become circumcised but Luke tells us a few things about his character in Acts 10:2:

- He was *"a devout man and one who feared God..."*
- He *"gave alms generously to the people..."* He was a generous man. His money did not control him.
- He *"prayed continually..."* He was a prayerful man. Verse three indicates they knew where to find Cornelius—at the place of prayer "...at the appropriate hour."

He was a very religious man and respectful of God but did he need to respond to the gospel of Jesus?

Chicagoland is full of Cornelius's today. In our lives right now, there are many people who are respectful of God but have not responded to the gospel of Jesus. We need to test our convictions as we consider this story. Do we really believe what was helpfully underscored last week—that all people need to hear the gospel? There is a Cornelius in each of our lives. They're religious people. Some may be Jewish; others may be Muslims. Many of them attend churches. They are Roman Catholics and Orthodox. They are Lutheran, Methodists, Episcopalian, Baptists, Presbyterian and they are right here in New Covenant Bible Church.

The Cornelius's of today have a number of convictions in common.

- First of all, they recognize that God exists, is the supreme Creator and Ruler, the Lawmaker and the Life-giver.
- Secondly, they value morality and take great care to distinguish right from wrong. They try very hard to live a good life.
- Thirdly, they think about life beyond this life and are concerned about their eternal welfare. They want to know they are living in a way that will be rewarded after death.
- Fourthly, many of them observe regular times of prayer. They go to worship services, are earnest about doing good works and carefully educate their children in their religion. Some are so zealous that they are willing to die for their faith.

I think it's particularly important this month for us to think about this because we have a man, a good man, who is running for president and he is a Mormon. He would agree with all of these characteristics that I just listed. But we have to be very careful to test our convictions, especially at a time like this. Do we believe that all people, even good, God-fearing, religious, devout people need to hear and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ? Is it enough to be like Cornelius? Are you ever tempted to believe that respectable, religious people don't need to hear the gospel? The story of Cornelius makes it clear that religion is not enough. Look at verses 3-6:

About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea."

We have a lot of David's on staff at church here. There are a lot of Simon's back here in the first century. Peter is staying at a tanner's house—a Jewish man named Simon. Interestingly, tanners had to touch dead animals since leather comes from dead animals. Since Simon was Jewish, Peter is comfortable going to his house but he's not as comfortable going to Cornelius's house.

God comes to Cornelius and says, "Cornelius, you need to hear a message." Look at chapter 11 where Peter reiterates the story of everything that happened when he went back to the church in Jerusalem. He adds an interesting detail about what the angel said to Cornelius in Acts 11:13. "Cornelius told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house." Notice, the angel didn't say, "Cornelius, we've been watching from Heaven and looking over the human race. You're one of the best ones there are. Cornelius, you are a fine specimen

of a religious, God-fearing man. You're doing a great job and living a wonderful life. Keep it up, Cornelius! We're sure you're going to make it to Heaven just fine!"

That's not what the angel said to Cornelius. Look again at Acts 11:13-14.

*And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say,
"Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; he will declare to
you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household."*

"You're a God-fearing man but you need to hear and respond to a message about a Savior, Jesus. You must respond! This message is the way by which you will be saved. Faith in Jesus is the only way of salvation. Cornelius, you don't just need a little touching up; you need to be born again. You don't just need to become more moral and religious. In fact, your morality and religion could be keeping you from a Savior!"

Tim Keller says, "The Christian call to conversion is not a call to morality and religion. It's a challenge to morality and religion." Often, it's our morality and religion that cause us to think we don't need what Jesus has done for us. We're using our morality and religion as a means of being able to say to God in the end, "I've earned and deserve this."

All other religions base eternal well-being on what one does. "D-O," is the main verb of all other religions. Do! Christianity is about what God has done—about the finished work of Jesus on the cross—and how we much trust and put our whole hope in Him alone.

As the fine, generous, God-fearing and religious man that Cornelius was, he needed to hear the message of peace with God through Jesus Christ and to receive the forgiveness of his sins through the name of Jesus. Cornelius was an upright man but upright men need a Savior.

Test your convictions on this. Is there anyone right now in your life you're tempted to believe may not need to hear the Gospel? Is there anyone who seems so good, so respectable, that your evangelistic zeal toward that person is actually being blunted because it's hard to believe that he or she is not going to make it to Heaven because he or she seems so good? Though you say, "Jesus is the only way," in your heart do you believe some people are going to be just fine without Him?

Maybe it's your best friend who is religious but doesn't seem to be putting her trust in Jesus. Maybe it's your son or daughter who grew up in the church but doesn't presently have a vital walk with Christ. Maybe it's your Muslim neighbor who prays five times a day. The Bible is very clear on this in Acts 4:12. *"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."* John 14:6 says, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through*

me.” Do we believe this and have the conviction that everyone needs to hear the Gospel, especially those upright, moral, religious people in our lives who respect God but have not yet responded to Jesus?

Cornelius needs to hear this message. It’s not going to come through the lips of an angel but through a man. God has entrusted this message to us! We need to proclaim it! The problem is that the messenger God wants to send is prejudiced against a person like Cornelius, so that raises a second test: a test of our prejudice.

2. Is the Gospel for Everyone? — A Test of Our Prejudice

Test yourself: Are you eager to share the gospel with anyone and everyone? Peter wasn’t. In his mind and heart there was a wall, a fence, a barrier, that would have made him very hesitant to go into the house of Cornelius and share the gospel with him. In Peter’s eyes, Cornelius was unclean—he ate unclean foods. For the Jews, the laws about foods weren’t just so they didn’t get food poisoning or have an upset stomach. These laws were about holiness and living for God in this world. For the Jews, the Gentiles were untouchable and unclean. The Jews didn’t want to go into a Gentile home because if a Jew touched an unclean person, the Jew could be defiled.

When Jesus came into the world, He ate with “unclean” people because He recognized that defilement is not on the outside but on the inside of human hearts. The heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. The defilement comes from within. Jesus didn’t come just to clean us up on the outside but to deal with the defilement of our hearts. God wants Peter to understand this point. It is so crucial that He gives Peter a vision. Look at Acts 10:9-17 and read about this vision.

The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, [the messengers are coming from Cornelius’ house] Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air [all of these were considered unclean foods]. And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “By no means, Lord...

Peter says things like that far too often. Two words that should never come out of our mouths together: “No, Lord.”

“...for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate...

Isn't it interesting how God is orchestrating all these events? He is on a mission and is weaving together dreams, visions, timing and messengers to get His gospel to all the nations. This same God is doing so today in the world. He's working out all His purposes to bring salvation to the nations.

Look at verses 19-23.

...And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.” And Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?” And they said, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.” So he invited them in to be his guests.

God wants Peter to be ready, and is preparing him to not call anything unclean or common that God has made clean. Look at verses 23-24 as we continue on.

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 had called together his relatives and close friends.

This whole family, whole household, is going to hear this message, respond to it and be saved. Look at verse 25. *“When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I too am a man.’”* One of the obstacles or experiences we'll have when we're talking and trying to point religious people to Jesus is that they'll be very tempted to put the focus on us. People will say to us, “You seem so godly. I wish I knew God like you.” We need to continually say, “Don't look at me; look at Him! Look at Jesus! Don't worship me but worship Him!”

Look at verses 27-28:

And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.”

Has God shown you that you should not call any person common or unclean? That you should not consider any person beyond the reach of the gospel? That you should not hold anyone at arm's length or harbor in your heart an attitude of disdain toward any person? Has God shown you not to rule out anyone on the basis of their race, ethnic origin, cultural or physical distinctives? Not to reject, despise or put a taboo on anyone because of surface distinctions? In verse 34, Peter gets to the crux of what God has been teaching him when he opens his mouth and says, *"Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."*

This is what God is teaching him. "Peter, My attitude toward people is not determined by the things humans judge. I don't welcome people based on their appearance, race, nationality or class." There are no racial barriers to salvation for Christians; all nationalities are acceptable to God. God is working to bring people from every tribe, tongue and nation to Himself. Cornelius does not have to become a Jew first in order to become a Christian but he does need to become a Christian.

This tests us in the area of our prejudices. Have you ever looked down on a person from another race or ethnic group and said, "Those people are unfit to hear the gospel from me"? Or have you ever thought about another person like this: "He's too unclean for me to go to his house. I wouldn't even want to set foot in that vile place!"/>? Have you ever said, "That person is not worth evangelizing," or "She has too many offensive habits for me to get anywhere near her"? Do you ever snub people or look at them like the Priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan? When you see them coming, you move to the other side of the street, either figuratively or literally so you can keep them at arm's length.

Have you ever written someone off, either beyond your ability to reach or someone you would not desire to reach? As we read about what God is doing in the heart of Peter, we need to be asking God, "Do this in my heart! Give me Your heart for people! Help me see people as fellow sinners in need of Your redeeming grace, no more or no less defiled than I am apart from the blood of Jesus." Get to know people who are different from you.

We live in a day and age and place where the nations are all around us. If we make an effort to cross some of these barriers, to break down some of these fences, we can get to know people who are very different from us. Take time to hear their stories and ask them questions about their backgrounds and cultures as an opportunity to share with them about a Savior Who is for all peoples, Whose name is Christ the Lord! Notice people!

This is something I've been convicted about over the last couple months. It started with a couple of my kids pointing out to me that I walked into a bank and was not very courteous toward the lady at the desk. I didn't really show her enough respect. It's made me wonder how many people I have encountered at the store, the bank and out in the community whom I'm not even noticing.

I heard about a man who was a high powered executive and was able to retire early because he had earned plenty of money. He didn't want to stop working but wanted to do something, so he went to work for ServiceMaster. He put on one of the green suits and cleaned offices. He said the most striking thing to him in his first two weeks working was that people did not pay any attention to him. Now that he wasn't the owner of a company and had on a green ServiceMaster suit, he said, "For two weeks I greeted people and they completely ignored me."

Ask God to give you His heart for all people. He is a God Who does not show partiality. In every nation, anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him. In the context of this story, we have to understand that to fear God is to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. To do what is right is to repent and believe in Jesus. That's what Peter does right after he says that. He proclaims the gospel.

3. What is the Gospel? — A Test of Our Understanding

What exactly is the gospel? I'm not going to elaborate on this point by point. I want to read what Peter preached and point out what the focus of the gospel was for him. Let's read beginning at verse 36. As we read, notice that Peter can't even say "Jesus Christ" without exclaiming, "He is Lord of All!" His gospel is about Jesus—the living Lord!

As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed:

Notice the focus in verse 38 is first of all the Life of Jesus:

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

This is one of the reasons why we're going to slowly walk through the Gospel of Luke. We need to get acquainted with the life of our Savior and see His heart and how He lived! We want to know Jesus in His life!

Then Peter moves from His life, His power over Satan and His love for people, to His death in verse 39.

And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God [two monumental words in Scripture] raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

His life, death and resurrection are the focus of Peter's gospel preaching. Then, because of the fact that He's the Judge of all, we must repent and believe in Him to receive the forgiveness of sins. This is part of the gospel message as well. There is an urgency here—a response is demanded. Look at verse 42:

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 the dead.

Jesus is going to judge all people. He's the One Who will decide where you will spend eternity. But before you meet Him as Judge, you can meet Him as your Savior Who will forgive your sins. Look at verse 43. *"To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."*

There's the gospel in a nutshell. He lived, died for our sins, rose from the dead and He will judge the living and the dead. Right now forgiveness of sins is offered in His name to all who repent and believe. That's the gospel! One of the things that keeps people from entering the church is that in many churches, this message is being muted or marginalized. But whenever Jesus Christ is lifted up, this gospel message is magnetic. God uses this message to draw people to Himself and the Holy Spirit empowers it. Jesus Christ lived, died, rose from the dead and He is coming again to be the Judge.

The Holy Spirit loves to hear the music of Jesus being proclaimed. Look at what the Holy Spirit does while Peter is preaching in verses 44-48:

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Test your understanding. Are you clear on what the gospel is? Do you see what Jesus has done and have you repented and believed? If you're the Cornelius in the room

today, you need to respond to this message and God will forgive your sins through Jesus' name.

4. Is the Gospel Enough? — A Test of Our Unity

God broke down some fences in Peter's heart and God wants to break down those fences in our lives and in our church. What do we require of people to really fit in among us? What does it take for people to be warmly embraced by you? Is it enough that they believe in Jesus and have received the gift of the Holy Spirit? For religious people, too often we're looking for more than this.

That's what happened when Peter went back to Jerusalem and told what had happened in Acts 11:2. *"So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, 'You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.'"* "How could you do that? They're unclean!"

Then Peter began explaining what God had done. Move down to verse 15. As he began to speak, he told them about how he was preaching and the Holy Spirit fell on them. Verse 16 says, *"And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"* In other words, "If God is saving and pouring out His Spirit on them, who am I to put up a wall and say, 'They don't belong in my world, my community or my church?'" Verse 18 says, *"When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.'"*

Today the issue is not circumcision but do we require anything plus the gospel for people to really fit in to our fellowship? Do we judge people by the way they dress, the kind of music they like, their politics or by their theological sophistication? Do they have to reach a certain bar before they're really going to be welcomed into our lives? Do we trust the Holy Spirit to mature believers? Do we believe that God, through His Word and by His Spirit, will complete the work He began in each and every one of us who believes in the gospel? Do we warmly welcome everyone to whom God has granted the repentance that leads to life? Or do we have some barriers to unity in our fellowship that may need to be broken down?

I love the story of Hudson Armerding who was the president of Wheaton College in the 1960's, during the hippie era. He was a World War 2 veteran who had fought valiantly

for our country. He was a conservative man who was groomed well and carried himself in a very professional, dignified way. He did not really like hippies. He didn't like their sandals and he did not like men with long hair. To him, that represented flag-burners and a lack of patriotism. It was hard for him. There were plenty of hippies at Wheaton College in the late 1960's.

One day he was scheduled to preach in chapel. Just before the service they gathered for prayer. A young man walked in who had a beard, long hair, a sash around his waist and sandals on his feet. He sat down right next to President Armerding.

Hudson Armerding tells in his book, Leadership, how he was suddenly not in the mood to pray when this young man sat down by him. But then the young man began to pray and said, "Dear Lord, You know how much I admire Dr. Armerding and how I appreciate his walk with You. I'm grateful for what a man of God he is and how he loves You and Your people. Lord, bless him today. Give him liberty in the Holy Spirit and make him a real blessing to all of us in the student body. Help us to have open hearts to hear what he has to say and may we do what you want us to do."

Armerding writes that the Lord began dealing with his heart—the walls he had put up and his prejudices. As he was preaching, the Holy Spirit convicted him and at the end of his message, he decided to ask that young man to come up to the platform in Edman Chapel. As he walked up to the platform, whispers filled the auditorium. "What's going to happen? Is the president going to kick this guy out of school?"

Instead of rebuking or dismissing him, Dr. Armerding put his arms around the student and embraced him. "You are my brother in Christ." When he did that, tears poured down the eyes of the students. They stood up, applauded and embraced one another. In 1970, there was a very, very powerful movement of the Holy Spirit at Wheaton College and in many college campuses across the country. God used that example of one man laying aside his prejudices to turn around the mood on the campus and to fill people with greater love and acceptance.

As we look at this story, ask yourself, "Am I looking for certain changes in people before I will consider them part of our fellowship? Am I putting up any barriers that are keeping me from actively loving? No one is off limits to God but is there anyone who is off limits to me?" Ask God to break down the barriers that would keep you from welcoming others the way God in Christ has welcomed you.

Let's pray. As we pray, I want you to try to picture in your mind a Cornelius in your life.

Father, we pray that You would fortify our convictions that these moral, religious, God-fearing people in our lives who respect You but have not yet responded to Jesus need more than anything else to hear the gospel and believe in Christ. Father, we are ambassadors for Christ. We pray that our minds and hearts would not harbor prejudices that keep us from going to all people, from stepping outside what's comfortable for us or from noticing people all around us.

“May the love of Jesus fill [us]
As the waters fill the sea;
Him exalting, self-abasing,
This is victory.”

(May the Mind of Christ, My Savior by Kate B. Wilkinson)

We pray for this, Lord. We ask, God, in our fellowship, the thing that unites us would be Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. That we would be charitable and gracious—not judgmental toward those who are different from us, who are at different places in their journey with You. Fill us with Your love, Lord. Make us agents of reconciliation. Help us proclaim our hope in the One Who lived, died and lives again to give us everlasting life and light and forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus. We thank You for this hope that we have. We want to hear more of it, to know it deeper and embrace it. For Your glory, we pray. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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