

Introduction

Good morning. It's good to see you here today. If you have your Bible, go ahead and open it up with me to the Book of Acts. We are going to be starting in chapter 4, and we are going to flip over to Acts chapter 10 toward the end of our time together today. We are continuing on in our series on the life of Peter. We are talking about the different callings that God has placed on our life. Today, we are going to look at the calling, the possibility that God would use us not only to save us but then would turn around and use us so that we might share his Good News with others. We are going to talk about the fact that we are called to go out into the world and to share with others who Jesus Christ is. So let's open today and let's begin today by praying, and then we'll jump right into Acts chapter 4.

"Lord, we are reminded this week that we live in a world that is broken and needs a Savior. Father, we do lift up the people of the Philippines and east Asia today as they face incredible destruction in the wake of a typhoon, so Lord we pray for them. God, we ask for those who are grieving, that have lost family members, Lord, that You would give them comfort. Father, for those who lost everything but are still alive, God, we pray that You would give them grace so that they might say, 'God, thank you for sparing me.' Father, I pray that churches here in Houston and around the world would follow the call of Jesus and would go and would love on them. Father, I pray that as You have done time and time again across human history, that You would use something like this, a tragedy, to draw people toward You. Father, that same prayer is actually the prayer that we need to pray for us today. Many of us have had difficult circumstances this week, and we need to be drawn to You. So, Lord, I pray for the people in this room, for the people that are here who aren't even really sure if You are listening right now, I pray God that You would draw them to You. For the people, Father, that are hurting because they have been abused and they have been betrayed, God, I pray that You would let them know that You bring healing and wholeness. Father, for the people here who are facing or staring down a disease, God, I pray that You would let them know that You are their comfort and You are their healer. Father, I pray that all of this comes from the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ, his Gospel, his Good News. Father, I pray that we faithfully proclaim it today. We ask this is your Name, the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen."

Acts chapter 4, we are going to start reading in verse 5. If you remember just a few weeks ago, God took someone who was a fisherman, on the side of the road, basically, just there on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and Jesus called Him. God has now transformed him from someone who was just an ordinary fisherman, not really educated, and suddenly now this person is being drug into court. He has been drug into court because he has stood up and he has preached the Gospel. He has said that Jesus Christ is God, and now he is facing imminent punishment. So here he is. He is being stared down. He is thinking that maybe he is about to be killed. He is not really even sure what's about to happen to him. So this is the scene that we jump in on in Acts 4:5. It says this, *"On the next day their rulers and their elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them..."* (So the "them" is Peter and John) *"...in their midst, they inquired, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?'"* (They had healed a crippled man)... *"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by Him, this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 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.'" Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were*

uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, 'What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.' So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.' And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old. When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, 'Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, sent by the Holy Spirit,

'Why did the Gentiles rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Anointed'—

"for truly in this city there were gathered together against your Holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your Word with all boldness, while You stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your Holy Servant Jesus.' And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the Word of God with boldness."

Why do people tell others about Jesus?

Because they have been changed by Jesus. (Acts 4:13)

Whenever we read stories like this, I think it is important for us to remember what Peter was like three years earlier. He was someone who would not be described as a preacher in any way. He was kind of a nobody, right? And now he is standing up and he is proclaiming, in the middle of the Jewish temple, who Jesus Christ is. I think sometimes we fall prey to sort of a weird disease whenever we read stories like this. We picture Peter and John sort of like spiritual superheroes.

You know, my kids love the Avengers right now, and we're watching a TV series Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. with them. I don't know if you guys have ever watched this show, but they love the idea of superheroes and this sort of thing. I think that sometimes whenever we read this we picture Peter and John, and in our minds they have on tights. Right? And they have a cape and it's like (enthusiastically) "Peter...John..." and they are going to take on everyone. What's funny about this is that's not what's happened. These are the same guys they were three years ago. What's happened is that they are not suddenly now muscled up, but what's happened is that God has changed them, and so they're able to proclaim. Do you know what's funny? I think that sometimes the reason that we don't share the Gospel is because we read these stories and we go, "Well, you know, I just wish I could be like that, but I'm not like that so I can't do that." Actually, the point of this story is that you are exactly like this. These are people that were fishermen three years earlier, and now they are starting the birth of the Church. God has picked people that the rest of the world thought

were nobodies, and He is using them now to create a movement. So this is the question, I think, today: "Why is it that some people share their faith, and why is it that some people don't?" Why is it that some people are looking for opportunities to talk to their neighbors or their coworkers, just to share with them who Jesus Christ is, and why is it that some of us get really, really nervous about that? So I want us to ask the question today, "What is it about Peter and John, and what is it about us that will make us and help us to share our faith?" I think the first thing actually, as I look at Acts chapter 4, is right there. It's in verses 13 and kind of right after that we read this. It says, "...when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men and they were astonished." The first reason that I think that people share their faith, why Peter and John did it, was what we just said... because they had been changed by Jesus Christ.

So, the word there "uneducated" – the Greek word is "agrammatoi." So it's "a" which is "without," the prefix there. "Grammatoi" is our word for "grammar." They were "without letters." They were never officially taught; they were never educated in any particular fashion. They were "without letters"; they were without education. And yet the people in that room looked at them and they said, "these guys, even though they are uneducated, we can tell that they are different." What does the Bible say about them? Look, it says, "They perceived that they were uneducated, common men and they were astonished." What does the second half of the verse 13 say? "They recognized that they had been with Jesus." The men in that room looked at Peter and John and said, "These guys have been with Jesus, and that is what has changed them. It is not the fact that they had studied."

We talked a few weeks ago about the way that the Jewish education system works. Did you know that in John 7:15, the same word, "agrammatoi" is used to describe Jesus. In John 7:15, some of the people are listening to Jesus, and Jesus is teaching and they say, "How is it that this man can teach in this particular way." They say, "How is it that this man has learning, Jesus. He has never studied." Jesus is described as "agrammatos." He is "without letters" as well. So Jesus is an uneducated leader, his followers have been uneducated, and yet at the same time they are turning the world upsidedown. Why? How? How is this possible? I think we have to go back to the second half of verse 13. These men had been with Jesus and it changed them. Peter and John had been so rocked by the fact that Jesus Christ died on a cross for their sins, that He was raised from the dead, that this truth transformed them. And when it happened, it completely changed their lives.

I don't know if you ever heard the old Christian blues song, but it would kind of go like this: "They hadn't been to seminary, but they had been to Calvary." The truth was that even though they had never been formally trained, it had caused an eruption of the heart inside of them. Do you want to know why I think that a lot of people in church today don't share the Gospel? It's because they have never let Jesus Christ change them. I mean, lots of people look at us and go, "these are ordinary, common people." But do you know what they don't do? They don't say the second half of verse 13. They don't go, "I recognize that she or I recognize that he has been with Jesus." Because what the Bible says is even if you're not educated... even if you are "agrammatoi," if you are without formal education, you've never been to seminary... even if you have never been to a Sunday School class in your life, but if you have been with Jesus, the Bible says that that will be recognizable to people outside of your life. How many of us have gone to church but have never comprehended the grace and the goodness and the beauty of Jesus?

I think a lot of times whenever we come to church, do you know what we do? We focus on sin and whenever we talk about sin, what we really mean... whenever we say "sin," at least the code word is "bad behavior." You know, if you do these things, these are bad things that you have done. You need to stop doing those things, and so we kind of talk in those terms and we think in those terms. Let's just drop the act

for just a second. Okay? Let's not talk about the things that we do. We all do bad things. Okay, we agree with that. But let's go even deeper. What's funny is that so many of us become so efficient and so effective at managing the behaviors that we do, we begin to trick ourselves. And do you know how we trick ourselves? We begin to stop talking about what's really going on deep down inside of our heart. Because deep down inside of our heart, places exist that we don't talk about at parties with other people. What is it that we talk about? We don't talk about the things that are inside of us, the things where we are literally conning ourselves. It's not that we do bad things. It's that, if we are honest, we are bad things inside. We look at other people and we envy their life. We didn't do anything. It's just in our heart; we want what they have. We see other people's spouses and we think to ourselves.. we desire. We go, "If I only had a relationship like that, somebody who loved me like that, someone who understood me like that." We trick ourselves into believing, "If I could only get married or if I could only get that promotion." And we think inside of our heart... it's not that we ever do anything, per se... but just right in here, we love things, we want things, and we never talk about those things. Right? You don't ever go around and say, "Well, you know, this week I was kinda looking at Bob's wife." I mean, you don't do that. (Laughter). "This week I was just thinking if I could really stab Shawna in the back at work, I could really get her position and get ahead." You don't do that. Why? Because we know deep down inside we should not do those things, but what happens is that we come to church and we get so focused on behavior that we sometimes forget to talk about the heart. This is what I want you to understand. The reason that Peter and John stood up and proclaimed the Gospel was not because they had learned how to stop cussing. The reason that they stood up and proclaimed was because the death and the resurrection of Jesus changed the very being inside of them. So they suddenly had a new heart, and they went, "I can't live like this anymore. I have to tell people about it."

I made some fried chicken on Monday. It was really, really good. I mean, I'm not bragging but it was really good. Literally, my wife... when she took a bite, Joy went, "That's the best chicken I've ever had." I was like, "What's up." I mean, it was amazing. I couldn't believe it. I almost cut my thumb off in the process of making it, but you know, I'm a man so I didn't go to the hospital or anything. You know, a little Band-Aid and it will be alright. In the process of doing that, and we're eating this fried chicken, I mean, it was like, "Wow... this is really good." I've only told about 500 people about it so far. I mean, I've done that. Because once I ate it, I was like, "Wow, that is amazing... That was so good." So, it's sort of bragging on myself, but it's really more just the fact that I've got this great recipe. You need to try it out. It's really, really good.

I've never been to Niagara Falls, but I was reading about Niagara Falls this week and just the amount of water that goes over. I want you to listen to some of these facts about Niagara Falls. Niagara Falls is 167 feet tall and across it is 2600 feet. Every second, 600,000 gallons of water go over the edge of Niagara Falls. Think about how you don't like carrying two gallons of milk at the same time and then picture 600,000 gallons of water going over the edge. But do you know what's funny? Even though I know about that, I have never stood in the mist at Niagara Falls. Raise your hand if you have been to Niagara Falls. You see, some of you have. So you, right now, you are going, "You don't get it. You can read about this all you want, but dude, you will not get it until you have been there." You know what? You don't get my fried chicken. (Laughter) ...Because I can tell you how good it was, but there were only four people at my table Monday night, and we ate every bit of it, so you don't get it. And I cut my finger off so I may never make it again. But this is the point: There are certain things that you experience them and when you do you go, "Whoa." It's like tasting food. It's like going to Niagara Falls. You go, "I get it because I've seen it and I've been there." You can read a recipe, but it's not like eating the chicken. You can look at a brochure. It's not the same as going to Niagara Falls. You can study Scripture but it is not the same as knowing and

experiencing the grace of Jesus Christ. Oh, I know. That scares some of us. Right? "I thought you said I'm supposed to read the Bible." You should read the Bible, but you can know this Book inside and outside, frontwards and backwards, and you could never taste and experience the goodness of God. Why in the world do you think in the Scripture it says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good"? Taste it, because when you taste it... only when you taste it... only then do you go, "Oh, this is something that is magnificent." My desire is that we will stop focusing on behaviors at Houston Northwest, and we will start focusing on the heart. Because whenever we start focusing on the heart, listen... once you taste the grace of Jesus Christ, you start telling everybody about it. You're not out there trying to be the person pushing it. You're not a salesman. That's not what you're doing. You're not the person out there trying to trick people into listening to the Gospel. No, it's not that. It's, "You're not going to believe how incredible this is. I have experienced this and it is amazing. I want you to know about this because I have tasted it and it changed my life. It is outstanding." So Peter and John, they are just like you... they're just like me. The only difference is this: The grace of God was tasted, and it went all the way down, and they said, "I've got to tell somebody about that." So my question is this: "Are we not telling certain people about Jesus because some of us say 'I don't know that I've tasted it. I don't know if I've really understood the grace of God.'" Listen. Once you understand that you were under condemnation and you were under judgement but God the Father pursued you in love through his Son Jesus Christ and He saved you. Once you get that, it changes everything.

Because they were not afraid. (v. 20)

So then these uneducated, common men... these "agrammatoi" men... they say to them, "You need to stop doing this. Look, we don't want to kill you today. We're just going to say, 'You guys go ahead. Y'all go on back out there but don't talk about this Jesus guy anymore.'" And this is what they say in verse 19: "*Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather to God, you must judge... (verse 20) "...for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.*" In other words, "You may want to kill us, you may threaten us, but you need to understand something right now. We can't stop talking about it, and we won't stop talking about it." In other words, "I'm not afraid of you." Do you know what? A lot of us, we don't share the Gospel. Do you know why? Because we are chicken. I mean, I know I feel like we're back in high school whenever I say that, but it's true. We're just afraid. We don't talk to other people about Jesus because we are scared. Fear is a powerful motivator. Pastors have used fear for years to manipulate people in certain ways, but I don't want to talk about fear in a manipulation way. I want to talk about fear in the sense that it prevents us from doing certain things from a peer-pressure perspective.

In my lifetime, I have been afraid of a whole lot of stuff. Some of it was real little, you know. I'm afraid of broccoli. Whenever I was a little kid, I didn't want to eat broccoli. Some things were valid fears, you know... rollercoasters. These sorts of things. Some of you are laughing at me, I know, but it's true. I was scared of rollercoasters. I was scared to fly. I was scared to go to graduate school. I was scared to move to Houston. Right? But do you know what's funny? It's that, on the flip side of those things, I have stared down all of those fears. I now love broccoli. I won't say I love to fly, but I'm not afraid of it anymore. I love Houston. There's a lot of things that we are scared of, but once we finally stare them down, we realize how exhilarating and how amazing they are. I can even tell you some things that I used to be afraid of, once I tried them out, not only was I no longer afraid of them, I began to actually love them. They became deep passions in my life. That's the crazy thing about fear. Sometimes fears hold you back and then you stare them down and you walk into them, when you step into those fears, they become things that you deeply, deeply love.

Peter was the same guy that when they said, "Hey, did you know this Jesus?" He lied to their face and said, "No." This is about 45 days after that. What's he doing now? Now, he says, "Hey, you can threaten me all you want; I'm not stopping talking about this because God told me to keep talking about this." This is my question: "How many of us are allowing fear in our lives to become a phantom obstacle?" Do you ever think about how many times in the Bible it says, "Fear not." The angels show up and the first thing they say, "Fear not." All through the Book of Joshua, "Be strong and very courageous. Do not be afraid." Jesus says, "Do not be afraid." We read in the Bible that perfect love casts out fear. Paul tells us, "Do not have a spirit of fear." Yet, many of us live our lives as if we are afraid that someone might discover that on Sunday's we worship Jesus. Forget that. We want to be like the people who say this, "Look, I don't care if you like me or not; I am going to tell you about Jesus because Jesus has changed my life." Listen. The day that you and I decide that the glory of Jesus Christ is worth more than our own lives, on that day... I'm going to say that again... on the day that we decide that the glory of Jesus Christ is worth immeasurably more than our own lives or our own comfort, on that day, that will be the day that we will start to tell people about Jesus and we won't care what they think.

When I was in high school, I wouldn't say I was crazy outspoken for my faith but I lived my faith, and I was in a community that was very much opposed to the faith that I was living out. As a high school student, particularly when I was about 15 or 16 years old, I underwent some pretty... today they would call it bullying. I don't know what you'd call it. People were mean. They cussed at me. They did donuts in my parent's front yard. They vandalized our house. They did those things because I was a Christian. I know you laugh about that, but it is the truth. Now, before you start feeling sorry for me right now, I want you to think about this. This week dozens of people were lined up in North Korea and publicly executed because they owned a Bible. You see, I didn't undergo anything. People in North Korea, they are undergoing everything. But do you know what? The people in North Korea? Do you know what they didn't do whenever they said, "Do you have a Bible? Are you a follower of Jesus Christ?" Do you know what they did not do? They did not stand up and say, "Oh no... that belonged to my grandmother." No, they stood up and they said, "Yes." Why? Because they count the glory of Jesus Christ to be worth more than their own life. And you know what? Whenever I was in high school, I don't think I could have put words to it, but the truth of the matter was, was I counted the glory of Jesus Christ worth more than my own popularity, and I think this is the case that we have to ask ourselves today. "Do we believe and will we say 'Yes' to the fact that the glory of Jesus Christ is worth more than our own personal comfort?" Because until we are willing to say, "I will never stop talking about what Jesus Christ has done in my heart and has done in my life"... until that moment, we will still subtly allow fear to control us. Are you afraid? Because if you are, remember this. *"Perfect love casts out fear."* That's what the Scripture says. Where does perfect love come from? Jesus. If you've got Jesus in your heart, He takes that fear and He drop kicks it. Boom... it is gone. Because you now know this... "I don't have to be afraid of you because I've got perfect love, I've got perfect acceptance, and I've got perfect redemption in my life." Let's not be afraid.

Because they ask God. (v. 29)

So they get to the end of this passage, in verse 29... Do you know what they do? They pray. They get back and they get back to the disciples and they start praying about this and they are like, "Lord, thank you." They get to verse 29 and this is what they say, *"And now, Lord, look upon their threats..."* so these people are trying to get us to stop preaching... *"look upon their threats and grant to your servants..."* So Lord, You've heard what they've said. They are going to kill us, they are going to arrest us... they are going to do these things if we start talking about Jesus. He says, *"Now Lord, grant to your servants to continue to speak your Word with all boldness."* In other words, the people who tell others about Jesus, they not only have

been changed and they also aren't just not afraid. Do you know what else it is? They ask God to give them boldness. They ask for it. They pray. Did you see what happened in verse 31? I don't think we had that verse up on the screen, but let me read it to you if you don't have a Bible with you. Listen to this: So they prayed and they said, "God, give us boldness..." Listen to verse 31: *"When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken."* It shook. Let's pretend that we started praying and when we said "Amen" the whole building shook. You thought it was a little earthquake that just happened. After you stopped screaming, after that happened, you would say, "God, You are powerful." All through the Scripture, particularly in the Book of Acts, do you know what happens? The Church gathers together and they pray. They say, "God, give us the power to speak in boldness." I just want to ask you a question. This is a pointed question. How often do you pray and say, "God, give me the boldness to share your Gospel today," and compare that to the number of times you say, "God, help me have money to pay my bills. God, heal my friend of their disease." I mean, not that there is anything wrong with those prayers. Those are good prayers, but how often do we get down on our knees and say, "God, give us as a church, me individually, give me the courage and give me the boldness. Lord, give me your Holy Spirit's discernment. God give me the eyes see. God, do whatever you have to do inside of my heart so that I will suddenly now be so bold that I will stand up and tell other people about Jesus." You see, the Holy Spirit, sometimes whenever we pray about that, we kind of think of the Holy Spirit as like kind of voodoo magic or something kind of weird like that. Do you know what the Holy Spirit is? The Holy Spirit, according to the Bible, is the third Person of the Trinity. What does that mean? The Holy Spirit is a person? It is the Person, the Spirit of God that then takes up residence in this world, after Jesus Christ was resurrected. So, in other words, Jesus Christ came back to life. He resurrected. He goes to heaven to be with the Father, but He leaves his Spirit with us. So whenever you become a Christian, the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit fills you, and it fills you and lives in you. In other words, every person in this room that has come to Christ, the Holy Spirit of God lives in you. Look around. All these people in here. You go, "Wow, there's a lot of people in here that would call themselves Christians." Guess what? Every person in here that says that they are Christian, the Holy Spirit of God is in you. So when we pray and we ask for boldness, why wouldn't the building shake? God's power is here... except sometimes we forget about it. We don't think about it. But they asked specifically. They said, "God, give us boldness and give us power." John 14:12: I want you to listen to what happens. Jesus is about to be crucified, and He is teaching his disciples, and this is what He says. I want you to hear this: "I'm about to leave... but when I leave, don't worry, I'm going to give you the Comforter. You will do even greater things than I." I'm going to say that again, because it's hard for us to comprehend. John 14:12: "You will do even greater things than I have." Jesus told his followers, "You are going to do things that are even greater than the things that I have done in my lifetime." Do you believe that the Holy Spirit of God in you empowers you to do things that are just as... no, even more miraculous than the things that Jesus Christ did? I mean, if I'm honest, most days I don't think like that. You know, I'm just trying to make it through the day. But the Bible says that God's Spirit inside of you will allow you to do things even more powerful than what Jesus has done. This does not mean that we are running around trying to do magic tricks. What does it mean? It means we will be allowed and able to preach the Gospel with more boldness and more clarity than even Jesus did in his time. So you can share it. Are you praying those kinds of prayers?

I had lunch with one of the men in our church this week. He started asking me, "What do you see for our church?" I just said, "Okay, I'm going to share some stuff with you, and this is crazy stuff. But let me just be crazy for a second." I said, "What if we prayed that the Gospel of Jesus Christ became so powerful and so pervasive in our neighborhood that there was no crime?" He even kind of laughed but like in a good way. He was like, "Yeah, you are nuts, but I like it." You know, it was that kind of a laugh. I said, "...Because every person in our neighborhood has come to Christ, so they don't turn to crime." I said, "What if there

are no children without loving parents in our neighborhood because the church has become so focused on the family that everyone who is without a father or a mother knows that they can be taken into a home within the church. What if the Gospel becomes so pervasive that we shut down the need for food stamps in our neighborhood because the hungry are taken care of by believers?" I said, "What if the Gospel of Jesus Christ becomes so pervasive that every child that had been labeled 'At risk' in our community has a mentor who tutors them and guides them in life?" And he said, "That is so big, I don't even know that I've ever thought about it in that way." And I said, "I know. And these are the things that God is starting to teach me, and He is starting to open my mind to say this." Now listen; I know some of you out there are saying right now, "That will never happen." Do you know what? You may be right. But could we not pray for it anyway? I can tell you this. If we don't pray for it, I will guarantee it will never happen. But if we pray and we say, "God, we want to pray great prayers for our neighborhood. God, we want to pray great prayers for our city." How does that happen? Because we have the audacity to come before our Father and say, "God, we want to see this city changed." How does that happen? Because we believe that the Gospel of the Kingdom is huge. We believe that it is big and it changes lives. Will we pray and ask that?

Because they love people like God does. (v. 28)

I'm out of time. I don't know if you know this, but there's another service coming in here in a little bit, so I can't keep preaching for the next 45 minutes. I had something else that I want to tell you about, so you are going to have to just trust me that I'm not making up stuff in the Bible. In Acts chapter 10, Peter has a vision, and this is what happens. Peter goes to the rooftop to pray, and he has a vision of food. It's food that's unclean, meaning that it didn't meet the Jewish dietary restrictions. The Lord's voice comes to Peter and says, "Peter. Arise, kill, and eat." Peter says, "No Lord; I will never do that because I have never eaten anything common or unclean." The Lord says this to Peter. He says, "Don't call anything that I have made common or unclean." Now what does that mean? Well, we don't have time to go into the theology of this today, but by the time that you get to the end of that chapter, Peter has figured out what God is talking about. Do you know what he says? He says, in chapter 10, I believe it's verse 28, "God has taught me that there is no people..." He's not talking about food anymore. "... there's no people in the world who are common or unclean."

I love bacon. Can I get an "Amen?" Anybody out there love bacon? (Laughter and clapping). Bacon was outlawed in the Jewish dietary restrictions because they couldn't eat pork. I've heard people make jokes about that. I feel sorry for my Jewish friends because they can't experience bacon. Let me tell you what happened in Acts chapter 10. It's not about food. What happened in Acts chapter 10 was that God said, "My Gospel does not belong to any one group of people, but now it belongs to everyone, so it is open to everybody else in the world." Let me put in language that you can understand. "God said the people of this world that are bacon I now bring into my Kingdom." Now, you like that because bacon tastes good. (Laughter) Here's the thing. Up until then, you were on the outs. I was on the outs. But God, in Acts 10, gives a vision to Peter and He says this, "*No person out there is common or unclean.*" So Peter shares the Gospel with a man named Cornelius who is a Gentile. Cornelius comes to faith and his whole family is baptized. So why does that matter for you and for me? Because I think the last thing that we have to hear before we leave today is this. People who share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, do you know what else happens to them? They begin to see people in the way that God does. Let's just have a moment of honesty, if we're talking about things that we don't normally talk about... let's just talk about it. Are you ready? I think a lot of us in this room, you know what we do? We have surmised that there are people in our lives who are unclean. They are bacon. They don't belong here, and we don't share the Gospel with them.

If I can just be real honest with you, when I was growing up, I used to view people in this way. I had sort of a weird ranking list in my heart. It was like, God clearly loves Christians the most and then all those Godless people are kind of down there. I even would say, "Well, He probably loves them a little more and those, a little bit." I had this kind of weird ranking thing of the way that I would think about different people out there in the world. Let me show you what I mean by that. This example is sort of mentioned in our devotional this morning, but let's pretend that today I was given the cure for AIDS. Let's pretend that I have a decision to make about whether or not I'm going to share that with the world. It would be criminal for me to not share it. I think every person in this room would agree with that. But... if you think like I used to think (this is the old me), you would have a moment where you would have that cure in your hand and do you know what you would do? You would think, "I don't know if I want to share this, because some of the people who got this disease, they deserve what they got." Don't hear me saying that's who I am now, but I'm telling you that's the way I used to think. Some of us in this room, we still think that way. Now, here's the thing. Let me tell you why we can't think like that anymore? Because, guess what? You had a spiritual form of AIDS, and you did not deserve the cure, but God gave you the cross anyway. You deserved exactly what was inside of you and the things inside of your heart and you deserved punishment and condemnation. Thank God that Jesus Christ didn't say, "I don't know if I want to give this cure, because these people deserve what they're going to get." God, please change our hearts so that we see the unclean people of this world as people that You created and You love. You have never looked eyes with a human being that was not created in the image of God. Ever. It's never happened. And yet don't we subtly and secretly say, "I don't know if this person is really worthy of the Gospel." Far be it from us.

So what do we do about that? Well, the answer is we tell people about it. I want to give you just a couple of practical things that you can do. First of all, we're taking a mission trip to Chilon, Mexico, in January. You should go on that trip if you've never been on an international mission trip before. It's primarily a medical trip, so it would be great if you have a medical background, but even if you don't have a medical background, you should go on that trip. You should email our office and you should talk to Pastor Dwight and you should go on this trip. And you say, "I'm scared. I don't know if I want to leave the country." I understand. We've got to not be afraid. It's scary to share the Gospel. But you know, at the same time, it's good to share the Gospel. I want to challenge you to do that. This is our goal this year. In 2014, our goal is to double the number of people that we send on international trips. Why? Because we know that when you leave the country and you go to an international trip and you see the way that other people live, it will change your worldview, it will blow your mind, and God will use it in great ways in your life. The second thing that we can do: You have a card in your chair there. It talks about Christmas Eve service. I want to just talk about that with you real briefly. This is what we know as a church, just Christians in general. Christmas Eve is a time that is second in attendance in churches, second only to one other day and that's Easter. Okay? We have done two Christmas Eve services at our church for years. In fact, we were going to do two again this year. But God has been doing some things in our church. He's bringing new families, He's bringing new faces. He's bringing people that are new. We started to just crunch the numbers, and we said, "You know what? If we do two services, we will all fit. The only problem is there will be no room for people that we invite." So we just had a moment this week in staff meeting. We were praying about it and we said, "If we only do two Christmas Eve services, do you know what we're saying? We don't care about the lost people in our community." So we have to do three. I tell you right now. That makes us nervous for a whole host of reasons. Will we have enough manpower? Will we be able to pull that off? I don't have the answer to that, but I'm just going to tell you right now. We believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is so important that we will give some time up with our family on Christmas Eve because, you know what? That is not nearly as important as helping someone avoid an eternity in hell. So, do you know what we're asking? I'm standing here today and I'm going to ask you to consider, if you're in town on Christmas Eve,

giving some time and volunteering on Christmas Eve here, for one of our Christmas Eve services. I know you think, "Man, that's a big ask." It really is. You're right. I understand that. Nevertheless, I will ask it because I believe that God wants to do great things in our community, and so if we know lost people are going to be here on that day, we're going to stand up and we're going to say, "Hey, we're going to serve you on that day." So those are two big things, and I hope you'll join me in that." But you know what? It may not be any of those things. Do you know what it might be? It might be simply this. "I'm going to walk across the street and I'm going to invite my neighbor across the street over for coffee and I'm just going to tell him about Jesus Christ." It might mean you are going to take your coworker to lunch and tell him about Jesus Christ. I don't know what it is that God is asking you to do, but I do know this. He has commanded every person in this room, if you have received the Gospel, if it has transformed your heart, and if grace is driven all the way down inside of you... do you know what you cannot do? You cannot keep it to yourself. If you are keeping it to yourself, you have to question, "Do I really understand grace?" So what will we do Church? Will we be people who will respond and say "Yes." God's love runs deep, all the way down, deep into us. Will we respond? I hope the answer is "Yes." Let's pray.

"God, You are bigger than anything that we could ever imagine or hope for, and Father, your love plunges down into our hearts and transforms us. God, we are no longer consumed with or controlled by anything other than your grace. Thank you. Father, may we rightly respond to your grace at this time, and Father, may we agree and say 'Yes' in carrying your Gospel into this community, this city, this world. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen."