

“Mission is Possible”

Acts 10:1-16, 44-48



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What is God doing in this whole salvation movement on Planet Earth? God is interested in more than saving people for heaven. The Bible says this is one of the first acts that happened after the resurrection of Jesus. Jews and Gentiles, males and females, slaves and free persons - anywhere there has been a division of hostility - are to be brought back together into one family unit. For this to happen there has to be a conversion.

On Easter Sunday I said that if you don't believe in the resurrection and the change God makes in you then you probably should have stayed home and slept late. I say the same thing to you today. To follow Jesus means there is going to be a conversion in your life. If you are not ready for that conversion, then you should have slept in this morning. God opened the door for us all to follow Jesus and here is how he made it possible.

Peter experiences this idea of conversion and even for him it was difficult to comprehend. Up until this time all Christians were Jews. But Peter had a different vision. I have to move us on to Acts 11:1, “When the news reached the apostles and other believers . . .” Remember followers of Christ were all Jews at this time. “. . . in Judea that the Gentiles had received the word of God..” The Gentiles are everybody else who is not a Jew. “But when Peter arrived back in Jerusalem, the Jewish believers criticized him, ‘You entered the home of Gentiles and even ate with them.’” If we are going to get people together, there is going to have to be a conversion that takes place.

Now think about this: Peter had already had a new birth encounter with Jesus. After all he was a disciple. But now he needed the conversion. He had to be converted from his religious traditions. You have some traditions in your life you think are Christian, but they are not Christian; they are religious. We all need to ask God to reveal those to us.

We all have a Mission that is possible to accomplish and here is the first assignment: Convert from religious traditions to a vital daily relationship with the living Christ. How are we going to be able to differentiate religion from relationship? To understand the difference I am going to contrast two mountains. The first is Mt. Sinai where Moses was given the law of God, the Ten Commandments. The second is Mt. Calvary where Jesus Christ died for the sins of humanity and the reconciliation of all of humanity to God and each other. I am excited about this contrast because it awakened me to a new understanding.

Mt. Sinai is about law righteousness, which says a person's acceptance by God is based on their ability to keep all of the rules and regulations. All *religion* is based on Mt. Sinai. What is essential to law righteousness, or Mt. Sinai, is the book. If you are going to keep all of the laws and regulations of God, you've got to know what they are. To know what they are, you've got to put them all in a book. Do you remember the woman who was caught in the act of adultery? They didn't bring the guy who was involved with her; they just brought the woman to Jesus. They told Jesus that the woman should be stoned. Jesus said, “Why should you stone the woman? They said, “Because *the book says* this is what she deserves, and that we should stone the woman.” We are going to see in a moment that Jesus says there is a higher law than the law of righteousness.

In stark contrast to Mt. Sinai, we have Mt. Calvary. It's interesting that the picture of Sinai is Moses coming down with his arms clutched around the Ten Commandments, what we call today "The Book." But on Mt. Calvary is the Savior with arms wide open. Aren't those two incredibly powerful symbols? On Mt. Calvary, it's not a law of righteousness; it is a law of love. To the woman caught in adultery, Jesus said, "Let you who is without sin cast the first stone." Jesus demonstrated that love is higher than law.

I want to say something that is going to shock many of you. When the Bible talks about the word of God, it's not talking about a book. For many of you this is the first time you are going to notice this. Acts 11:1, "Soon the news reached the apostles and other believers in Judea that the Gentiles had received the word of God." It's not talking about the New Testament; the New Testament hadn't even been written yet. It's not talking about the Old Testament because these Gentiles had not received the Jewish law either. When the Bible talks about the word of God, it's talking about God who is active and present, working and speaking in the moment. That's called "the living word." The written word, once it's on a page, is not living unless you allow it to breath life, be active, speak and work today. Jesus is the living word of God. The living word is a higher authority than the written word.

Let me put it to you this way: When I was a kid there was an occasion when I had babysitter. The babysitter always got written instructions, a list of what I was supposed to do. What television I could watch, what homework was to be done and what time I was supposed to be in bed. However, when my parents came home, the babysitter left; now the written word that they left did not have the same authority or meaning as their presence with me. Once the babysitter went home, the living presence had more authority than the written instructions. It's why so many times you read in the New Testament, "Jesus said, 'You heard that it was said or it was written, but I say unto you . . . you have heard that it was written an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (equal punishment), but I say to you if someone comes up to you and smacks you on one side of the head, you are to turn and let them do it again. I say unto you, you are supposed to forgive your enemy. You are supposed to love your enemy.'" The living word is a higher authority than the written word. It doesn't mean when my parents came home that there wouldn't be consequences for me disobeying the written instructions that they left. It was just that there is a greater authority in their presence than in their written word.

The second Assignment in this Mission is to convert from our exclusive cliques to inclusive community. We don't have our Holy Huddles in the church, do we? We've even named our Holy Huddles in more generic terms! How many of you are from other denominational backgrounds? How about the circle of "non-denominational" which is a denomination in itself but don't tell them. We all have the same book, right? We have to move from exclusive cliques to inclusive community.

Look at Acts 10:28. Peter told these Gentiles who showed up, "You know it's against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with you." What laws do we have in the church about people we won't associate with? Are there people we put down or make fun of? Some of the meanest people I know attend a church. God has shown me that I should no longer think judgmentally. This new community of Jesus is a community that is not finding ways to build walls and barriers. It's a community that's tearing down walls and bringing people in. This is why Jesus is the hope of the world. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." He said, "I am the Son of Humanity." Jesus is the hope of every person. There are many things I disagree with in the United Methodist Church, but our denomination got it right when we came up with the slogan, "Open hearts, open minds, open doors."

The final assignment in this possible mission is to convert from devotional faith to missional lifestyle. Here is what I mean: Cornelius the Gentile and Peter the Jew were brought together by prayers. Cornelius believed in the God of the Jews even though he had not become a Jew. It is critical that every day you are taking time to listen to God. When you are taking time to listen to God, you are going to hear God speak.

Moving from devotion to mission means that when God speaks to you, it's not just for the purpose of inspiration or personal transformation; it is for divine mission. God works through all of us. You are strategically placed right where you are. Jesus is not only the light of the world; he is the hope and savior of lives. God is going to connect people to Jesus through you. Or are you saying, just like Peter, "God they are outside of my acceptable scope." Or, "I don't know how. I don't know that much about the Bible. I don't know what I'm going to say to them." Here's the great thing: the Holy Spirit has preceded you. He's already prepared their heart. You are working with these folks; you are living next to these folks; maybe you are married to this person. Maybe they are in your house. Maybe they are your friends. God has already prepared their heart. We don't have to try to convince the unconvinced. All you need to do is tell them what Jesus has done in your life. You don't have to be able to explain it or argue it. Just tell them what Jesus has done in your life and what he is doing for you.

Your Mission Is Possible:

Convert from religious traditions to a vital daily relationship with the living Christ.

Convert from our exclusive cliques to inclusive community.

Convert from simple devotional faith to a pure missional lifestyle.