

Join in God's mission!

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- [0 : 0 0] Father, as we gather together as your people, would you open our ears and our hearts once again. Help us to receive your word and to allow it to reshape our hearts and our minds, that we might indeed join you in what you are doing in this world.
- All this we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Now, if you're a parent with young kids, you're probably acquainted with Dr. Seuss or Dr. Soys, as I found out that was the correct pronunciation. I found that out yesterday.
- But I'm just going to say Dr. Seuss because I'm so used to saying it that way. But Dr. Seuss is the guy behind the Grinch, the Cat in the Hat, and Horton Hears a Who. But one of his lesser-known children's stories is called the Sneetches.
- There you go. The Sneetches are tall, yellow creatures who live on beaches. But there are two kinds of Sneetches, you know, those who have green stars on their bellies, that's the snitch on the left, and those who don't.
- And those with green stars boast, we're the best kind of snitch. There they build exclusive campfires around which they sing their songs. They are the in-crowd, the insiders.
- [1 : 1 2] And those without the stars are the outsiders. But one day, a stranger with the great name Sylvester McMonkey McBean appears and offers the Sneetches without the stars a chance to get them with his star-on machine, all for the price of just \$3.
- Now, of course, all the no-star snitches line up to get them. Now, with the stars, they're no longer on the outside. They've got the stars. They have the same bragging rights.
- But this upsets the other snitches who are in danger of losing their special status. But Sylvester McMaster McBean tells them, hold on, don't worry, I've got another machine, a star-off machine.
- And for \$10, you can get your star removed. And so the snitches with the original green stars happily have them removed, all so that they can remain special.
- They can remain as the in-crowd, the insiders. But of course, now the snitches with the add-on stars, well, they want to remove them as well so that they can be on the inside.
- [2 : 2 0] And so they pay another \$10 to remove them. And so this back and forth continues with the snitches running from one machine to the next to have either their stars added or removed.
- Now it's an amusing children's story, but it's also a very insightful one.
- Dr. Seuss gets human nature. He understands that as human beings, we naturally like to divide people into two groups, those on the inside and those on the outside.
- And all of us, whether we admit it or not, want to be on the inside. Now perhaps in school, we begin to work out who seems to be the in-group, and subconsciously we begin to adopt their style of conversation, mimic their mannerisms and activities, watch the same TV shows, all in the hope that one day we'll be considered as part of the gang.
- Or perhaps we worked out that if we're really good at this sport or that musical instrument, we'll be looked upon with favour and admiration denied to others.

[3 : 39] Now even when we're out of school, the groups and the things that get us accepted might change, but the desire doesn't. And when we're left on the outside, we feel the pain.

Now as Sarawakians, we know this pain very well. It's why there is so much support for a Sarawak for Sarawakians movement, because many people feel that they've been left out.

They feel that they've been left out of infrastructure development, they've been excluded from political empowerment, that the history textbooks give inaccurate explanation of who we are, of where we've come from, of what rights we have.

And even though we're meant to be Satu Malaysia, we feel that we've been left on the outside. We're outsiders. Well, all throughout the Bible, God cares about the outsider.

He cares about the excluded. Now God has always been inclusive. From the very beginning, when God created this world, He wanted to include humankind in His plans for the entire world, to take care of it and cultivate it.

[4 : 53] And even when we turn against God and our neighbour, having our own plans for this world, even while excluding God from it, His love remained constant.

And so in Genesis 3, even when God has to punish Adam and Eve and banish them from Eden, He tenderly shows His care for them.

Although they are now outsiders to the garden, He clothes them. And then from then on, His big plan was always to bring humankind, cut off from His presence, back into His presence.

He wants them not to remain outside, but to be on the inside, that they may experience His love again. And that's what we find as we keep reading on in the Bible.

This has always been God's mission. And so in Genesis 12, when God chose Abraham to be blessed, that blessing was never meant exclusively for him and his descendants alone.

[5 : 57] Instead, 12 verse 3, God states His intention, that all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through Abraham. And so when Abraham's descendants do indeed become a nation, Moses makes sure that they don't forget this.

In his final speech, in Deuteronomy 10, verse 17 to 18, he reminds them, The Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.

He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow and loves the foreigner, the outsider, residing among you, giving them land and clothing.

It was never just about Israel. And time and time again, we hear this word about how God wants to bring all peoples to Himself. Take the prophet Isaiah, for example.

Here's Isaiah 56, verse 8. The sovereign Lord declares, He who gathers the exiles of Israel, I will gather still others to them beside those already gathered.

[7 : 12] Isaiah 60, verse 3. Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn. That's God's mission.

But the Jews are like those star-bellied snitches. It's hard for them to give up their special status as those initially chosen.

It's hard for them to remember that God's mission is wider than just saving them. And actually, it's hard for us too. When we become Christians, what that means is that we've been included in God's family.

We've become citizens of God's kingdom. We're given a special status. That's the amazing news. But what can happen is that we begin to hold onto that not as a gift to share with others, but as a special right to be protected at all costs.

After all, in our environment today, we often hear talk, don't we, about protecting our rights. And so we can be like snitches who get the star, but don't want others to get the star.

[8 : 26] We think in terms of us on the inside and them on the outside, rather than us as people who've received gifts and who now want to invite others to come and receive that gift as well.

And so God has to prepare us to buy into and join in his mission. And that's what he did with the early church.

You see, in the opening chapters of Acts, the gospel is mainly preached amongst the Jews. Now, that's not surprising because most of the apostles were more or less still in Jerusalem.

But they might have stayed there if God didn't step in. And so in Acts chapter 8, God gently begins to push his people outside their comfort zone.

Because of persecution, God has many of them leave Jerusalem. And some of them go, first of all, to Samaria, where Samaritans, who are half Jews, hear the gospel and are saved.

[9 : 32] And one of them, Philip, encounters an Ethiopian eunuch and he believes in Jesus too. And so the gospel is starting to move beyond Jewish borders.

But now today, in Acts chapter 10, we get an even bigger turning point. For if it wasn't crystal clear that the gospel is for outsiders as well, it is now.

And God makes this clear by engineering a meeting between two men. Two men who would never have even crossed paths if it wasn't for God's divine intervention.

Two men. One a Gentile, another a Jew, one an outsider, another an insider, but both in need of the same Savior.

And so let's get to know them in turn. First of all, the outsider. In chapter 10, verse 1, we're taken to Caesarea. And so we're beginning to get really far away from the Jewish heartlands.

[10 : 38] For this is Roman territory, not a traditional Jewish city. This is a place where there are far more Gentiles than Jews. It's where the Roman procurator was based, a position somewhat similar to Carrie Lam as chief executive of Hong Kong.

And the Italian regiment is there, in part because there is always the possibility of conflict between Jews and Gentiles. And it's here we're introduced to Cornelius.

He's a centurion, someone who has quite a number of soldiers under him, and so a man of status and rank. But more interestingly, verse 2, he's described as devout and God-fearing.

What that means is that although he wasn't technically a Jewish convert, he wasn't circumcised, nevertheless, he worshipped the God of Israel, Yahweh, and he sought to live as much as he could according to Jewish law.

He gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. This is obviously a man of piety. And as God sees his prayerfulness and his generosity, God knows this is a teachable man.

[12 : 00] This is someone receptive to his ways, someone he can reach out to. And so God sends him a messenger. Cornelius, the angel says, I've got a mission for you.

Summon this guy, Peter, hears his address. And notice how clear and specific this vision is. God is about to do something amazing and so he's not going to leave any room for ambiguity.

After all, he's going to ask Cornelius to do something that he would never have dreamt of in a million years. He asks him to approach a Jewish civilian and invite him home.

And what's more, a good devout Jew would never want to step into the home of a Gentile anyway. And if God wasn't so direct, there was no way either party, Jew or Gentile, would have considered even meeting.

But in fulfilling his mission, that's often how God works. He takes the initiative he prepares the way. God here is working far away from the suburbs of Jerusalem, in a Roman city, in a Gentile home, unseen by anyone except Cornelius himself.

[13 : 21] The Jewish temple may be far away down south in Jerusalem, but God isn't limited by the fact that no Jewish religious institution is located at Caesarea.

He's getting Cornelius ready for the most momentous occasion of his life to hear and accept the good news.

And so God is at work even in the less obvious places. And God is still at work today, going before us, preparing the hearts of people.

Yazid, not his real name, is a Christian missionary in the Middle East. He tells the story of meeting a man in a Middle Eastern city far away from any Christian influence. And so this man told Yazid, you know, a man wearing all white knocks on my door every night.

I can't look at him because his face is so shiny. But I let him in and he asks me to write down what he says. And as I'm writing, I will fall asleep.

[14 : 28] And then the next night the same thing happens. And this has been going on for a month. And so Yazid asked this man, well, can I see your notebook? Can I see what you wrote?

And so this man showed him. And what Yazid saw astounded him. The notes began, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The man had been writing down the entire Gospel of John without realizing it. Well, do you know this man? This person asked Yazid. And so Yazid said, yes, yes I do.

And then he told him about Jesus. God had been preparing the way, working in a city with virtually no Christian witness, in the life of a man who had no access to the Bible.

And so when Yazid came, he simply had to do his part, share the Gospel. Yazid was a missionary, but that didn't mean he had to accomplish his mission all by himself.

[15 : 33] Rather, he simply had to join in what God was already doing in this world. And so as Christians, we can be reassured that if what God wants is for the nations, for outsiders of every stripe to come to know him, then God will be at work.

Now, majority of the time, it probably won't be as dramatic as the stories of Cornelius and Yazid here. But he is at work. And that means we can take a step of faith and play our part to share the Gospel where opportunity arises.

And if you're not a Christian here this morning, perhaps God is doing something in your life if you just open your eyes to see it. Why has he brought you to church this morning?

Why has he told you about Christianity explored? Perhaps he might be prompting you to give him a chance? Well, that's exactly what Cornelius realises.

For though the instruction given by the angel is quite radical, he doesn't hesitate. He calls for three trusted men in verse 7, and then he sends them on their way to Joppa.

[16 : 51] For who is in Joppa? Well, this now brings us to our second party, the insider. The insider. That's the apostle Peter.

Now, Peter is as Jewish as you can get. And what sort of people are the Jews? Well, let me tell you. Jews don't spend time with Gentiles, much less go into Gentile homes.

After all, they're meant to be holy, set apart. They're not to mix around and do the stuff that the other nations do. Otherwise, they'll be just like them.

They're the insiders and the non-Jews, the Gentiles, they're the outsiders. And so, it seems impossible that Peter would ever agree to meet with Cornelius.

And in any case, isn't Peter more than busy enough? God's just used him to perform a miracle in Joppa, in Acts chapter 9. And many people believe, so there's plenty of discipling to do.

[17 : 51] There's plenty of work for him. The church is growing in Jerusalem and Samaria. They could probably use his presence as well. But God's ways are not our ways, and his plans are not our plans.

And to ensure that his gospel is going to continue, going out, God has to prepare Peter. That's his priority. And so, it's noontime.

Peter goes up to pray, and he gets hungry. So far, so ordinary. But God takes an ordinary moment and turns it into a divine appointment.

Peter gets a vision as well, verse 11. He saw heaven open and something like a large sheep being let down to earth by its four corners.

It contained all kinds of four-footed animals as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.

[18 : 54] And Peter is shocked. He knows the law. He knows Leviticus 11. You don't eat unclean animals such as these. And he knows who he is.

He's a good Jew precisely because he obeys these regulations. That's what places him in the in-group. And so, he protests, Surely not, Lord.

Never, Lord. But just as God was clear with Cornelius, God is now clear with Peter, verse 15. Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.

And because this is Peter who always needs extra convincing, so the vision has to be shown to him three times so that he gets the message. And to really hammer home his message, God gives him one final sign, verse 19.

While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.

[20 : 03] And Peter went down and said to the man, I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come? The man replied, We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man who is respected by all the Jewish people.

A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he can hear what you have to say. And so, if it wasn't clear to Peter before, it's clear now.

This vision isn't really about animals. This vision isn't really about food. This is about people. Do not call anything or anyone impure that God has made clean.

And it will be really interesting to get into Peter's head at this point. Perhaps he's suddenly remembering what Jesus used to do, going to Gentile places like Tyre, helping to drive the evil spirit from the daughter of an unclean Seraphim woman.

Perhaps he remembered that Jesus didn't just feed 5,000 in Galilee, in Jewish territory, but that he actually fed another 4,000 around Decapolis, in Gentile territory.

[21 : 21] So what Jesus gives the children of Israel, he gives to outsiders as well. And so this is about people.

The barriers that used to separate Jews and Gentiles, that define the insiders from the outsiders, are beginning to be dismantled. God is determined to bring everyone, Jew and Gentile, back into his kingdom.

The two come together. The two come together. Now is Peter getting it? Well actually, even before God sends in the vision, there are signs that he's already taking baby steps.

For one thing, he is staying with a tanner. Do you know what tanners do? Tanners are the guys who make leather from animal skins. And it's not the kind of job that a devout Jew would normally want to be associated with.

After all, you have to deal with all those unclean animals. And yet, Peter doesn't seem to mind staying with such a person. Perhaps he heard that those half-Jews, the Samaritans, have accepted Jesus and he was beginning to experience a paradigm shift.

[22 : 39] And if there's any doubt, if we still doubt that he doesn't get it, well, verse 23 lays our doubt to rest. Then Peter invited the man into the house to be his guest.

Gentile people being offered accommodation in a Jewish home. Unthinkable! But that's exactly what Peter did. You see, he's getting the message.

God wants to welcome the outsider. And the message has made its way into Peter's heart. And so he begins to do unthinkable things. He welcomes this Gentile delegation into his home.

And more than that, verse 23, he goes from Joppa to Caesarea to visit a Gentile's home. He's joining in on God's mission.

And what a contrast he is with another Bible figure. I wonder, for those of you who have been Christians for a while, whether you remember another person who was in Joppa?

[23 : 45] Do you remember another person whom God wants to send to the Gentiles? Well, in the Old Testament, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Jonah to go preach to the Gentiles in Nineveh.

But what did Jonah do? He went to Joppa with the intention of going in the opposite direction. He was running away. But Peter had learned the lessons of Jonah.

He goes in the right direction. He goes to the Gentiles. For as he explains to Cornelius upon arriving in verse 28, you are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile.

But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure and unclean. God wants to welcome the outsider.

God's mission is now. I wonder if we really understand just how far reaching this is. God's mission is nothing short of revolutionary but it's hard for us to grasp it.

[24 : 57] You see, what is God really asking Peter to do? I suppose the closest thing I can think of in light of current affairs is if the Ukrainian president decided that he will go and treat the supreme leader of Iran to a nice dinner.

Now, that would certainly get people talking. But that's the mission God is calling us to. You know, a common New Year's resolution nowadays is to get rid of the toxic people in your life.

people say, oh, just get rid of all that negative energy. If they don't appreciate your presence, give them your absence. You know, that's common advice from the world. But God says, think of a person right now that you regard as toxic.

And then God says to you, that's the person I want you to share the gospel with. God's does that help you to understand just a little bit more how boundary breaking God's mission is?

But that's what Peter does, verse 29, without any hesitation. But why has God engineered this meeting? Well, it soon becomes clear.

[26 : 24] Peter is received into Cornelius' home. Cornelius tells him about the vision. And then in verse 33, he says, we're ready. We are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.

What message is so incredible that it's able to bring these two of us together? And actually, there's more than two people in this room because verse 24 tells us that Cornelius had caught together his extended family and his close friends to listen in.

And so Peter realizes what he's being asked to do. He's here to testify to the universal gospel's power. He's here to proclaim how Jesus alone can bring insiders and outsiders together.

He's here to say how the love and the grace and the mercy of Jesus is so big that it drives Christians even to pray for people who are called toxic and unwanted and undesirable by everyone else.

It's a message for the Jews. It's also a message for the Gentiles. When we compare Peter's preaching in verses 34 to 43 with the preaching that we find earlier in the book of Acts, we discover there's little difference.

[27 : 49] Yes, the earlier sermons given to a Jewish audience had more explicit Old Testament references. And this sermon given to a Gentile audience isn't so heavy on those, but it is the same gospel.

And what is that gospel? It is a message about one person, Jesus Christ, who is the one Lord of all, Jew and Gentile alike.

That's in verse 36. And this one Lord has one good news of peace, that he didn't just perform miracles, as even the Gentiles knew, in verses 37 and 38, but that he died and rose again, verses 39 to 41.

And now this one Lord says that this one gospel is to be preached to everyone without discrimination, verse 42.

For this one Lord is the one judge of everyone who has ever lived or died. But if anyone, whether Jew or Gentile, whether male or female, whether rich or poor, whether socially polished or socially awkward, whether respectable or scandalous, whether PhD holders or school leavers, if any of them believes in Jesus, they can know God again.

[29 : 16] Verse 43. And if this is really the gospel, this is its nature, then verse 34 must be true.

Peter realizes this. Verse 34, Peter began to speak. I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.

We come to God not based on our own merits or our own background, but solely on the basis of the finished work of Christ. We were all outsiders to God, but only Jesus makes us inside us.

And so God welcomes anyone and everyone who puts their faith in Jesus. But now this raises a challenge for us. For if God does not show favoritism, then neither should we.

The question is, do we? Who do we really welcome? Who do we choose to ignore or speak to?

[30 : 28] Is it only those in our age group, whether young or old? Is it only those who have grown up in the church or come from what we think are the right families? Is it those whose lives are well-adjusted, who has no family or mental health problems?

Are there people whom we mentally label as undeserving, whom we think is unworthy of being called a disciple of Christ? We won't say it out loud, but maybe that's what we think.

Perhaps there are those who are slow in some way, slow physically, slow to learn, slow in understanding how to relate to others.

God does not show favoritism. He welcomes all. He makes that crystal clear in verses 44 to 46 because these Gentiles, when they accept Jesus, they receive the Holy Spirit.

Just as the Jews had experienced the blessing of Pentecost back in Acts 2, now these Gentiles receive the same blessing here.

[31 : 39] That shows that God has fully accepted them. And Peter draws the same conclusion in chapter 11 verses 16 to 17. Now not everyone everywhere will speak in tongues when they accept Jesus and get the Holy Spirit, but here they do as an unmistakable sign.

They're included. And that's the lesson that Peter has to ensure the church understands. Prejudices have to disappear. That's the point of chapter 11 verses 1 to 18.

Some of the Jewish believers heard that the Gentiles were becoming believers and so they were disturbed. For them this was wrong. Surely God would want these Gentiles to be circumcised first, to be Jews before they could receive Christ.

And so Peter has to clarify. He tells them the story of Acts 10 all over again, the vision, the command, the preparations, and the action.

And every one of those things are just different ways of God telling the church over and over again, prejudices have to disappear. And thankfully, the early church accepted this.

[32 : 58] Look at 11 verse 18. When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, so then, even to Gentiles, God has granted repentance that leads to life.

God's mission includes them too. And so as we wrap up, what are some of the big takeaways that we can take from this story? let me just make three final applications.

Number one, if God's mission is to reach out to those on the outside, then that must be our mission too. A few years ago, research was done in North America showing that nearly 20% of non-Christians who lived there did not personally know a Christian.

And that percentage became much higher when they narrowed it to people who would be considered outsiders in that country. So for example, 75% of Sikhs and Hindus living in the United States as well as 65% of Taoists or those who practice traditional Chinese folk religion did not know any Christians.

Do you hear that? Three quarters of Hindus living in the United States did not know a single Christian. Now I have no idea if any similar research has been done in Malaysia.

[34 : 20] If you know, please do let me know. But while I wouldn't know the statistics, one thing I'm quite certain about is this. There are people in our country, in our neighbourhoods, maybe even in our schools, who do not even know a single Christian.

And God's heart is for them. God's mission is to reach all nations. That doesn't mean every geographical nation, but every people group. And he wants to reach them through you and me.

You know, it's quite possible that actually, there are non-believers in your circle of friendships who do know a Christian, but they're not aware of it because they didn't know you are a Christian.

They didn't know that one of their friends believe in Christ. now, wouldn't it be great if they did know? And wouldn't it be even greater if not only did they know that you're a Christian, but they began to realise that being a Christian is not just a Sunday-only thing for you, but that it impacted every part of your being.

Wouldn't it be great if I bumped into one of your friends on the street, and then I told them, oh, yes, you're a Christian, and I'm your pastor, and they say, oh, yes, I know. He always likes to talk about Christ with me, not in an aggressive or forceful way, don't get me wrong, I enjoy the discussions with him, and I don't believe yet, but one thing I do know, right, he really believes, and he really does try to live like the one he believes in.

[35 : 59] Wow, wouldn't that be fantastic? What an encouragement that would be. And the good news is, don't forget, when you join in on God's mission, if you choose to boldly proclaim, and live unashamedly like a Christian, amongst your non-Christian friends, well, God is behind you, and he goes ahead of you.

And so you have one massive advantage. In this mission, you can pray. You can pray for opportunities, you can pray for courage, you can pray for the right words, you can pray for divine appointments.

I heard this quote from William Temple, the former Archbishop of Canterbury recently. He said, when I pray, coincidences happen.

When I don't, they don't. Isn't that lovely? And isn't that biblical? I think it's no accident that when God gave visions to Cornelius and Peter, they were having times of prayer.

And so why not pray? And take a step of faith to reach out to someone you know who's on the outside. Perhaps invite them to Christianity, explore the worst they can do is politely decline.

[37 : 18] Why not consider going on that trip to Myanmar? It might change you profoundly. Well, whatever it is, why not take that step of faith and actively join in God's mission?

Number two, if God's gospel means we are nothing but outsiders who have been graciously included, then we mustn't have an attitude of fearing or lauding it over others, but to invite them in.

In other words, we mustn't be like the sneetches at the beginning of this sermon. Now, we mustn't be naive. The gospel of Jesus Christ has real enemies.

But because the gospel of Jesus Christ has real enemies, so sometimes the temptation is for us to retreat into a holy huddle, to take up defensive positions, especially as a minority grouping in this country.

But we must remember that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil. And to stand firm against them, our feet have to be fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace, as Ephesians chapter 6 puts it.

[38 : 32] In other words, we simply keep proclaiming the gospel. To stand firm, we just keep participating in the mission of God.

Peter and Cornelius are natural enemies. A Jewish leader of a new movement and a Roman centurion on the side of the oppressors. But here is the power of the gospel.

As Peter proclaimed these good news, natural enemies became unnatural friends because of a supernatural message.

And so, my friends, let's not forget who we are, outsiders who have been graciously included. And this will enable us not to fear or despise those on the outside.

Because we are just like them. We're all in the same boat. We're all people made in the image of God, corrupted by the four, and now offered a chance to be redeemed and remade through the same gospel.

[39 : 37] When we are sharing the gospel, we are simply beggars telling our fellow beggars where to find food. We were all snitches without stars, but now that we've been given the star, we're simply telling our fellow snitches how to receive that star.

star. Now, that's an important thing to remember because in our current political climate, it's quite common to talk about Sarawakians as the inside group and everyone else outside Sarawak, especially West Malaysians, as outsiders.

Now, as Christians, we can have a diversity of views when it comes to federal-state relations, no problem. We can have a variety of political views. But as Christians, we have to be careful of the way we define ourselves against others.

We do not want to make our place of birth the absolute bedrock of our identity. And so we mustn't make Sarawakians and non-Sarawakians the new dividing line.

You see, if we do, we could be in danger of being like the old Peter. We could be in danger of enforcing a wrong kind of purity, the kind of purity where we keep people out, because they are unclean, quote-unquote, by virtue of their place of birth or upbringing.

[41 : 00] For if we do so, that means we have not fully grasped the implications of the gospel. It is no longer our place of birth, but our new birth in Christ that should now fundamentally shape who we are.

And so as Christians, Christ should now shape our attitudes so that we are soft-hearted towards others, seeing anyone and everyone, whether they are orang Malaya or orang Jawa or orang Putih, as people in need of the gospel, rather than categorizing them as groups of people whom we deem unsafe, impure, or unclean, those on the outside.

number three. If God doesn't need Cornelius to become a Jew to be a Christian, then we mustn't set up unnecessary barriers to somebody becoming a Christian.

Now, of course, none of us will say today that you have to become a Jew to become a Christian, but it's quite possible to fall into the same trap. We might imply to someone, you can't be a Christian at all until you've made this particular change.

You have to stop smoking first, then you can become a Christian. You have to reach this level of Bible knowledge first, then you can become a Christian. You have to be like me, then you can become a Christian.

[42 : 27] But that's not right. To become a Christian, the only biblical requirement is that you have to repent and put your trust in Jesus. So that means you're saying, Jesus, I'm making you the Lord of my life from now on and trusting in what your cross accomplished for me.

And so yes, it does involve a change in direction. That's what repentance is. But that's not the same as saying, I need to make sure that everything in my life is completely straight, completely clean, and that only then I'll follow Jesus.

Because that makes you the saviour, not Jesus. believing in Jesus is more about dependence and less about strength of will.

Yes, you will need to change, but first you accept God's grace in your life, not the other way round. And so we must never imply to any non-believers who wants to become a Christian that they must tidy up their life, that they must get everything completely straight before they follow Jesus.

And so as a church, let's not put any unnecessary barriers to someone becoming a Christian. And that means we might have to live with some discomfort from time to time. Well, let's say that somebody came to Christianity Explored and he became a Christian.

[43 : 59] And he comes to church on a Sunday with dyed hair and tattoos everywhere on his body. Are we ready to welcome him? We must. The Bible doesn't say anywhere that he must have natural hair color before he becomes a Christian and be fully included in our church family.

Instead, our attitude should be the same as that of 11 verse 18. We should say, isn't God great? He has granted repentance that leads to life to even this person.

Praise God. And so here is the Bible's vision for church. We anchor ourselves in Christ, building on the foundations of love and grace found in the gospel.

We move on in maturity, not being like babies anymore who cannot take more than milk, but we remain teachable so that we will not become adult thumbsuckers, but grown-up spiritual parents.

And then we join in God's mission, letting the gospel overcome our prejudices and then reaching out to those on the outside. God's vision even back in the first and the second centuries, and this is God's vision for us in 2020.

[45 : 16] So as we finish this series, let's not sit back and just tell God, I'm not interested. No, let's instead trust God and submit to him and talk to what he wants to do in us and through us.

let's pray. Heavenly Father, we just pray now that as we have heard the story of Cornelius, we pray that you will be speaking to us.

We recognize that there is a task unfinished. finish. And so please, Lord, would you help us to complete that task? Thank you for including us in your plans.

And will you help us not to put up unnecessary barriers, not to have the wrong attitudes, but help us to be motivated afresh, to reach out to those who do not yet know you.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.