

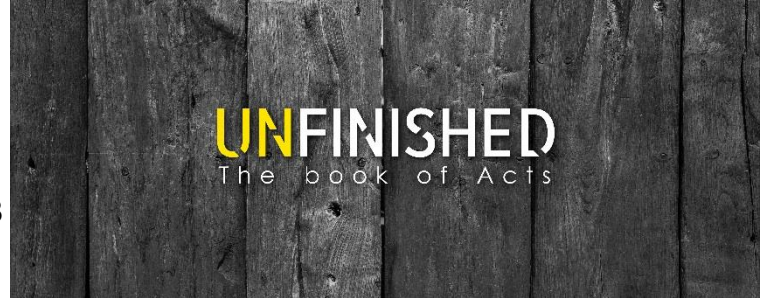


VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Unfinished

Part 18: Papa's Got a Brand New Bag
Acts 9:32–10:33 | Tim Badal | January 21, 2018



We are in a series on the book of Acts, seeing how the early church lived out the Great Commission in the days following Christ's resurrection and ascension. We've traveled a long journey so far. In the earlier chapters we read about Peter, John, and the other original disciples. In the last couple of weeks, we've been introduced to a new character—Saul of Tarsus, a persecutor of Christians. On the road from Jerusalem to Damascus, where he was going to snuff out the church so the gospel would spread no farther, Saul was blinded by a vision of Jesus. Jesus asked Saul, "Why are you persecuting Me?" When he came face to face with Christ, Saul bowed in repentance and obedience, believing Jesus to be his Savior. He remained blind for three days, until a man named Ananias was sent by God to heal him and to welcome him into the Christian community. Last week we learned that after this transformation, Saul spent three years alone with God—possibly to heal from the guilt and bondage he had felt. This story previews the life of Saul, who would become Paul, the great apostle of Jesus Christ.

Then Luke shifts the spotlight off Saul and puts it back on Peter, who had previously been the main character in Acts. Peter actually stays on center stage through the first half of the book, after which Paul's ministry is highlighted, including his missionary journeys in which he reaches the Gentile world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Peter now is beginning to minister in areas outside Jerusalem. In Acts 9:31 we read, *"So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied."* Peter had previously spent most of his time in Jerusalem, but now that the persecution has died down, he ventures into the outlying regions. So we'll be learning next about his stops in Lydda, Joppa and Caesarea.

Our passage today is quite long, which is my fault. About a year ago, when the other campus pastors and I put together this study, I don't quite know why we divided the book this way. So today, as we walk through this text, I want to give a running commentary on what we see in it.

My heading for this lesson is, "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag." In 1965, a man named James Brown—who was known in Motown, but who wasn't really known elsewhere because of his skin color—decided to introduce the world to a new music style. Many who were in the Motown community felt something was missing in the music industry and that music had grown stale. James came on the scene with a splash through a song titled, "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag." You're wondering of course what the connection is, right? If you read the lyrics of this song, they're talking about an old man who enters a night club. Everybody wonders why an old man is in this hip place. Even his family is wondering, "Why is Grandpa in a place like this?" But then as the music is playing, Grandpa gets up and cuts a rug like no one has ever seen before. At the end of it, he declares to those who are watching, "Papa's got a brand new bag."

What that means is this old man had something no one thought he had. He was doing something completely unexpected. And this was a metaphor for the new music James Brown was bringing into the cobwebs of the existing music world. This song had heavy horns and downbeat measures, a style that eventually made James Brown a household name. This song became the 71st greatest song of all time. It made an impact because it was something new.

You might still be wondering, "Tim, where are you going with this?" In Acts 9 and into Acts 10, God is doing a new thing. Right when the church began to think things were settled, God brought in new work. Specifically, Christianity was no longer a Jewish-only faith,

but it was going to minister to Gentiles of all nations. We'll see that in the conversion of a Roman centurion named Cornelius. This new thing should bring us great joy, because we know that Cornelius' conversion led the way for the rest of us Gentiles from all other nations. Now 2,000 years later, we can also become part of the Christian family. God's plan, which Paul would call the great mystery, was now being unveiled to the world and it shook the world to its core.

Our text gets us thinking about ministry.

I'm going to look at our story under three headings this morning. First, our text gets us thinking about ministry. Let's pick up the text in Acts 9:32:

³² Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. ³³ There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. ³⁴ And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose. ³⁵ And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

So where is Lydda? Let's say Sugar Grove is Jerusalem. If you go west about 30 miles, you'll reach Lydda—about where DeKalb is. Peter has left Jerusalem to go to Lydda, where he's ministering to believers. There he finds a bedridden man named Aeneas. We have no idea what caused his paralysis. It shouldn't surprise us that Peter would find broken and hurting people in Lydda. They were like us, with all kinds of ailments and struggles and medical conditions. When Peter found Aeneas, he told him, "*Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.*"

Some of you went into the room of a teenager this morning and said, "Rise," because they looked dead, "and make your bed."

Aeneas was healed—and that's all we know about him. We didn't know much before and we don't know much after.

Luke leaves that scene and takes us next to Joppa. So if Jerusalem is Sugar Grove, Lydda is DeKalb, then Joppa is straight north of Lydda on the Mediterranean Sea. It might be like Rockford.

Verse 36 continues: "*Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas.*" Now, if you were in the third grade and your name was Dorcas, you'd probably want a different name. You could get beat up for having a name like that. So we'll go with the name Tabitha. (Actually, Dorcas means gazelle. Maybe she was fast?) What we do know is this: "*She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.*"

Peter has gone to meet the believers in Joppa, where Tabitha is one of them. We don't know how old she was, if she was married and a mother, if she was rich or poor. We don't know anything about her personality—except Luke tells us she was a generous woman who did acts of service.

So let's pause and ask ourselves, what would Luke say this about us? How generous and serving are we? When there is a need, are we there to care for another person? Or are we simply known for our position in life, or for where we live, or for the car we drive, or for our athletic or academic accomplishments? I believe Luke includes this story in part because this is what Christians are supposed to be known for. Out of gratitude for what God has done for us, we should be generous with our time, talents, treasures, and testimony for the gospel of Jesus Christ. I believe the world needs more Tabithas, and it needs to start with me.

This woman in Joppa, who was faithfully serving the Lord, then died. We don't know what illness caused her death. But as was their custom, they prepared her for burial, but first they put her in an upper room—probably part of the funeral process. And since Lydda was near Joppa—like Rockford is near Dekalb—word got out.

³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Please come to us without delay." ³⁹ So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room.

Now, we really don't know what these disciples thought Peter was going to do. Perhaps, as new believers, they weren't quite sure what Christians were supposed to do with their dead and how God was to be honored in their funerals. What better person to advise them than Peter himself, so they wouldn't defile God in any way? So Peter went to Joppa without delay. "*And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them.*"

This is a common practice for us as well. We weep over the individual who has passed, and we talk about the things they have done. We show pictures to remind us of the life of this person and who they were. Funerals haven't changed that much over the years.

⁴⁰ But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

Wow! She was dead, Peter. What did you do? We thought this was just going to be a regular funeral and now, through the power of Jesus, you've done so much more.

"And it became known throughout all Joppa." You think? I'm glad Luke included this detail, but honestly, we could have assumed it. When someone is raised from the dead, word will definitely make it around town. *"And many people believed in the Lord. And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner."*

So here in the course of ten verses we have two miracles, but we have very few details beyond these. Why would Luke speak so briefly about the healing of a paralytic here? We read earlier of Peter and John healing the paralytic at the temple gate, but there we were given more details. In the case of the raising of Tabitha, again Luke doesn't tell us much in this miracle that is even more amazing. Why doesn't he tell us more?

Stop coveting the miraculous moments they were given that impact the temporal.

I think the reason Luke doesn't go into detail is that he wants us to think primarily about ministry, rather than about the miracles. I wonder if he is exhorting us to stop coveting the miraculous moments that impact the temporal. I think he knew that over time, his readers would be inclined to desire miracles such as these over anything else. We would want to have that kind of ministry, that kind of faith, that kind of church.

Maybe some of you have told God, "If You would just let me see miracles of healing or even raising the dead, then I would be more confident about my faith and more energized to share it. I would be bolder if I had seen something like this." Both the miracles in our text were temporal. Aeneas would one day become sick again and that time he would not be healed. Tabitha would die again and that time Peter wouldn't be there to raise her. She's no longer with us today.

So as tremendous as miracles are, they are still temporal. Yet our temptation is to covet them, because we are more focused on the temporary than we are on the eternal. Yes, we still believe God can and does do miracles in our day, for His glory and to reinforce the message of the gospel, but they are rare. Our emphasis needs to be, not on healings and other miracles, but on the preaching of the good news.

To be sure, we might think that's less glamorous or flashy, so our temptation is to seek miracles and their temporal effects. But I think this is the reason Luke emphasizes the results of the miracles: *"many people believed."* Verse 35, *"And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw [Aeneas], and they turned to the Lord."* Notice, it says "all" the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord. A revival broke out!

Again in verse 42, *"And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord."* As we see, two communities have been changed—not because the miracles lasted forever, but because of the message that accompanied these miracles. They realized that Jesus was the life-changing Messiah of Whom the prophets had long ago foretold. This was the message: that when they turned in repentance and faith to Him, they would have eternal life.

Start capturing the marvelous moments we are given that impact the eternal.

Those people who came to know Jesus were not changed temporally, but were changed eternally. I think Luke wants us to stop focusing on the miraculous and start capturing the marvelous moments that impact the eternal. We have been given the opportunity to share the same message, although maybe without the bells and whistles of a temporal miracle. But we do get to talk about the miracle of the life change we've experienced.

As the world receives our message they too can become part of the family of God, with an inheritance from Him that will not be temporal, but eternal. We are promised an inheritance in glory that will last eons and eons and eons. For all of eternity we will rejoice in and fellowship with the King of kings and Lord of lords.

So stop coveting miracles and start capturing opportunities to impact people for the gospel of Jesus Christ in your workplaces and communities and schools, knowing that the change will not be temporary but eternal. We need to think about ministry and think about it differently.

Our text gets us listening with humility.

In chapter ten we move to one of the most impactful conversions in the book of Acts. We've recently read what was probably the most impactful conversion in the story of Saul. But in Saul's case, it was a ministry impact. Saul went from being a persecutor to a disciple of Christ and one of the greatest proclaimers of the gospel.

In the story of Cornelius, his conversion was missional. When he comes to believe in Christ and is baptized, this represents the opening of the floodgates for the gospel to go to the Gentiles, specifically into the household of Caesar, the Roman leader.

Notice that once again Luke is shifting the scene. We started in Jerusalem, then we went to Lydda, then north to Joppa. But if you think about Joppa as Rockford, the next stop will be Caesarea, which might be like Janesville, Wisconsin. Even though Peter was still in Joppa, something was happening in Caesarea.

Caesarea was the provincial capital of the Roman Empire in the region of Judea and Samaria and was obviously named after Caesar. It was the “City of Caesar” like our capital city was named after George Washington, our first President. Luke tells us that Cornelius was a centurion, which meant he was the leader of a hundred soldiers, specifically the Italian Cohort.

Most groups of soldiers didn’t have a name like this, so it probably implied they were a special group, sort of like our Navy SEALs. This was an elite group of men and Cornelius was probably a great leader to be assigned to them. But then look at what Luke tells us in Acts 10: Cornelius was “*a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God.*” Later in verse 22 we learn that he was “*an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation.*” We might not think that to be particularly important. But we must remember that the Romans were occupying the land of the Jews, therefore were not at all welcome. It was very unusual for the people to speak well of the man who was over the occupying forces. It might be like a Russian army that moved into Fox Valley and kept all of us under surveillance.

Apparently Cornelius was such an amazing man that even the Jews spoke well of him. He was someone upon whom God had put His hand of favor. He was upright and had given generously to the people in the area, but also we’re told that he prayed continually to God. And beginning in verse three, we see how God responds to Cornelius’ prayers:

³ About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, “Cornelius.” ⁴ 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. ⁵ And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.” ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, ⁸ and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

The angel told him, “I want you to get Peter. He’s in Joppa. Here are his GPS coordinates. Go get him.” Cornelius sent a devout soldier, meaning he believed the same way Cornelius did, and a couple other servants to find Peter. Cornelius was obedient to God.

Then the scene shifts from Caesarea to Joppa:

⁹ The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. ¹⁰ And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” ¹⁴ But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” ¹⁵ And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

So two men, in two separate cities—who couldn’t be any more different in upbringing or circumstances—both received messages from God. We might be thinking, “Well, if I can’t see a miracle, can I at least hear a voice from heaven?” We sometimes wish when we’re talking to God that He might be like a celestial Alexa from Amazon.

I recently got a Dot that’s sitting next to my bed. It’s pretty amazing. You can turn it on and ask it, “What’s the weather going to be like today?” and it tells you. “Alexa, could you set an alarm for me tomorrow morning?” You can tell it what music you want it to play. “Alexa, wake me up by saying I’m a good guy,” and she’ll wake me up saying, “You’re a good guy.” It’s pretty amazing. You ask and you receive.

Some of us would like God to be like that—snappy snap, right? I ask God for something, then He opens up a vision and shows me the answer. I’ve been asking God a lot of things and haven’t audibly heard anything.

Now these two very different men are both seeking God in their own way and He announces to them very clearly, even including GPS coordinates, what they were called to do.

We want to know how we can have something like this happen in our lives. We need to know a couple things about how to listen to God with humility. First, we must recognize that God is still speaking to His people. So if you think there’s been a transition, that since the first century God is no longer communicating, that’s not true. He communicates to us in many ways, but we must “test

the spirits” by the way He has spoken to us most clearly, which is through His Word. He also speaks to us through godly counsel from those who have walked with Him longer than we have. We can also hear from Him as individuals through a still, small voice.

Maybe you’re wanting to hear from God regarding a direction in your life or some concern you’re dealing with, but He hasn’t responded. There are three reasons why this might be the case.

In order to hear from God, we must be active in prayer.

You need to ask, “Am I actively praying?” Both Peter and Cornelius heard from God while they were watching TV, right? Or they heard from God while they were listening to music on their way to work. Or they heard from Him while they were hanging out with a group of friends, telling stories. No. As different as these men were, they both heard from God when they were in a posture of prayer.

You might say, “But Tim, when I’m praying, I’m talking. How can I listen?” Well, prayer should not be just us talking to the Lord. It’s also a time when we hear from Him. As pastors, we may have misled you by preaching about prayer as a regimented and rote exercise. We tell people they should pray in public the same way we pray in public. My prayers in public are a lot more formal and structured than my private prayers are. I might be in a number of places when I find myself concerned about something—maybe regarding God’s will for me as a father or as a husband or as a business person or as a pastor. “Lord, what direction do I need to be going in here? I see a couple options—which is the better one? I need You to make this clear, so speak to me.” Then I stop and listen. I can’t tell you how often I’ve asked these simple questions and God has brought a verse to mind. Sometimes it’s the verse that says, “*They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles*” (Isaiah 40:31). Other times the answer might be found through the wisdom of counselors, with God reminding me of people who have gone through something similar to my situation. Or sometimes I might be drawn to a Scripture that says to me, “What are you thinking, Tim? You know you can’t do that. That breaks one of My commandments.”

There may be times when we pray according to a pattern, such as Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication (ACTS). There’s nothing wrong with that. But that’s not my focus today. We must learn to be active in a posture of prayer where we can hear God speak. Here are a few things to remember.

First, this kind of prayer is private. It doesn’t happen with a lot of people around us. Rarely does God speak in large groups—He usually talks to people one on one. We need to get away from the distractions where we can be alone with God. Both men in this story were alone.

Second, this kind of prayer is persistent. Cornelius continually sought after God. Earlier in Acts we’re told that Peter and the disciples were continually devoting themselves to prayer. Don’t think you can go home and get some kind of instant response from God regarding a direction you need; it might take more than one season of prayer. Some of you have been waiting on God’s answer for days or weeks or months or years. That’s where humility comes in. We must wait like good soldiers until our Commanding Officer gives us the instruction or answer we’re requesting.

Finally, we must expect God to personally answer us. These men both had different requests. Peter was seeking God’s will regarding how he was to carry out the Great Commission, maybe wondering how he was to reach the “ends of the earth” when he was only ministering to Jews. Cornelius didn’t know what he needed from God, but he was actually seeking someone to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with him.

We need to pray—whether in groups or as individuals—with specificity. That way, when He answers our prayer, we know He has moved in our lives. That’s what it means to be active in prayer.

In order to hear from God, we must be available.

Both Peter and Cornelius heard from God because they were available, which means more than simply carving out time for prayer. “Okay, Lord, I have an appointment with You at 3:30. I’ll be available for about 30 minutes.” No, availability means having a heart attitude that says, “I’m coming to You because You’re God.” We’re told that Cornelius was “God-fearing.” He respected God because he saw all that God had done and was doing in the world.

In order to make ourselves available to God, we need to meditate on His awesome power until we realize we have little to say. “I’m going to shut up, because I want to hear from You. I want to spend time with You.” When we remember how much greater God is than we are, it quiets our hearts and brings us to a place of listening. Our faith grows as we think about Who God really is and to whom Who we’re actually talking.

Second, our availability includes the recognition that we are broken and in need of help. Both Peter and Cornelius needed God to direct them. On their own, they would never have met each other. When we go to prayer, we're acknowledging our dependence on God for direction.

Third, availability requires persistence and fortitude that enables us to wait until we receive an answer.

In order to hear from God, we must be adjustable.

The two men in our story heard things from God that required them to adjust their lives. Cornelius was told by God to send an entourage down to Simon the tanner's house in Joppa where they would find Simon Peter. They were to bring Peter back to Cornelius who was to do whatever Peter told him to do. Meanwhile, Peter's prayer was answered in this way: "There are a group of men who are coming from Caesarea. They're not going to kill or imprison you. They're going to take you to a God-fearing man named Cornelius. When they come, go with them and tell him the good news of Jesus Christ. He has been seeking Me and I want to give him the rest of the story."

In both cases, there was an action they were required to accomplish, something they had no previous hint that they would be called by God to do. This required them to adjust their lives in order to obey God. When Cornelius sent his soldier, he was communicating that he needed something from God. Romans were probably not quick to acknowledge any need, but he adjusted and became obedient to God's instruction.

Peter had to decide if this group of men who represented the enemies of the Jews could be trusted. It was the Romans who had crucified Christ and it was the Romans who approved the imprisonment of Christians. But God had instructed him to go with them to meet with their general. Beyond that, he was going to be investing his time with Gentile "dogs," first by welcoming the servants into his home and then by accompanying them back to Joppa. But most unusual of all, Peter was going to tell the Gentiles that they too could receive the salvation of Christ and become part of the covenant family of God, even as the Jews themselves were. Talk about adjusting. Yet both men, without hesitation or argument, obeyed the instructions they were given.

If I can be pastoral for a moment, I want to say in all love and sincerity that there have been prayer requests of mine that have gone unanswered—not because God hadn't given the answer, but because I didn't like the answer. I was unwilling to adjust my life to incorporate the answer God had given me. Some of you have also been given an answer from the Lord. You're still wondering when He's going to give you His answer—but He answered you three years ago! You were just too set in your ways to adjust how you did things to follow His answer. You came up with all kinds of reasons why it wasn't the right idea. While we're belly-aching that God is not answering our prayers, He sometimes already has. We're just not willing to do what He's asked us to do.

That's a hard truth to swallow. But what God was requiring Peter to do runs really deep. Peter was raised to despise Gentiles. They were considered sub-human in his mind. He saw them as representing that which is defiled. In the Babylonian Talmud, which is a set of rabbinical writings, we're told that Jewish families began their day by saying, "Praise God that He did not make me a Samaritan or a Gentile."

If we put that in our cultural situation, we might praise God for something like this: "God, I'm thankful I don't live in that kind of place. Thank You that I'm an American. I'm not like those people. Thank You for making me white and not black or brown or Asian. I'm glad I'm white. Thank You for making me rich, so I don't have to live in the ghetto or work minimum-wage jobs."

This is pretty much where Peter was that day. It was the way he was brought up—which is often true of us as well. Peter was required to adjust both how he listened to God and how he thought about other people. God wasn't concerned about Peter's hang-ups—He demanded obedience. The reason some of us don't hear from God is that we're unwilling to be malleable in ways that will bring Him glory.

Can I tell you something? Churches are like this as well. Some churches haven't heard from God in a long time because God has given them the answer to their growth problems, but they didn't like His answer. He told them to reach a certain group of people, but they couldn't bring themselves to do it. "Those aren't our neighbors. Those aren't our friends. That's not our community. We leave those people alone."

"Lord, why don't You grow our church?" "Because you've nailed down 50% of the demographic you won't touch, because they're "those kinds of people." If we're not adjustable, we will not hear what God has to say. Peter is adjustable to the will and plan of God.

Our text gets us moving beyond bigotry.

Our final lesson today is that God wants us to move beyond bigotry. Peter serves these Gentiles and spends time with them in his own home. Then he goes to Caesarea and enters the home of a Gentile, which was unlawful according to Jewish law. There he proclaimed to Gentile people the Jewish gospel, and when they responded, he baptized them—not only Cornelius, but his entire household.

How does Peter get beyond his bigotry? Well, in some senses he doesn't. In Galatians we read about a gathering of Jewish and Gentile believers. Peter is fine with the Gentiles when they were the only ones in the room, but when some Jewish guys came into the cafeteria and saw Peter with the Gentiles, Peter said, "Hey, I've got to go. I can't be seen with you." Paul rebuked Peter for this. As we can see, this is an on-going challenge for Peter. But in this moment, he rises above his ingrained assumptions and follows God's instructions.

This is a great week to be discussing these things, having just celebrated Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday and his contributions to our society. It's also the 50th anniversary of his tragic death. He wasn't a perfect man, but he helped us understand our racial issues. And he said the most segregated time in the week is Sunday morning in our churches. This isn't to say we should pursue diversity just for the sake of diversity. We have to see where God has planted us and ask, "What is the make-up of the community around us?"

I am predominantly of Middle Eastern descent. My dad is from Iraq. I could get mad and accuse you of being racially biased, because there aren't a lot of Iraqis in our church. We don't have enough Assyrians in our church. No, if you do a demographic study, you'll find there are only a few Iraqis in this area. There aren't many people in the Sugar Grove area with a Middle Eastern background. Even though our community dictates the type of diversity we can have, nevertheless we should be open and ready and excited when people of all different races and backgrounds find their way into our communities. It's happening more than we know. Our schools are becoming more diverse. Our communities are becoming more diverse than ever before. Instead of putting up walls, we need to be putting down welcome mats, welcoming these people into our lives, into our families and into our church communities—not as second-class citizens, but as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Racial integration is secretly and publicly condemned by far too many Christians and churches.

Sadly, bigotry is in its essence opposed to racial integration, which is too often condemned by Christians and churches. Some of you may even be wondering why I'm talking about this. When we talk about "these people" and "those people," be careful. Maybe it's from the influence of our parents, but some of us carry in our hearts the idea that we are superior to other people because of our skin color or the country we call home.

It wasn't too long ago that the last vestiges of racial segregation were still to be found in Christian colleges. In the 1980s, one of the most well-known Christian colleges in America still allowed segregation of black and white students. They couldn't date or marry. Racism, whether in the heart or outside, is a pox on the church and it runs completely contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ. You cannot be a good Christian and a racist at the same time. We have to be honest about this. Sometimes it's a struggle to know how to get beyond these feelings.

Racial integration is central to the Biblical plot line.

Why is racism against Christianity? Racial integration is central to the biblical plot line. In the beginning was Adam and Eve and their family. From that family more and more families came, until we reach the book of Revelation. That was a fast summary of Scripture, wasn't it? In Revelation we are told about one family—the family of God—and it's described as being from every tribe, tongue and nation. Not the whites, not the Americans, but from every tribe, tongue and nation. God has previewed this in many ways.

If you're a racist, you're really not going to enjoy heaven. There will be people who are way closer to Jesus with different skin colors and different styles of worship and different speech patterns and traditions. But God will say to them, "Well done, good and faithful servants." It will blow our minds.

Racial integration is crucial for the times we live in.

Never before has the globe been so interconnected as it is today. The largest migration of human beings in history is taking place—and has been for the last ten years. Because of technology we can talk around the globe without any delays. Because of technology we ourselves can be on the other side of the globe within the matter of a day. We are connected like never before to all the nations. Because of this, we can go to the nations in a way we never could before—and they can come to us.

We don't need to talk about this in theoretical terms. For example, Aurora has been flooded with refugees within a couple mile radius of our campus there. We have dozens of nationalities who are attending and we praise God for that, because He's bringing the nations to us.

He's also bringing the nations to Sugar Grove and Hinckley and Yorkville. We just need to open our eyes and receive them. In some ways we've done well with that, but there is more we could do. It's crucial for the times in which we live. How can we do better?

Racial integration is made complete only through the gospel.

Peter says in Acts 10:28, *"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. So when I was sent for, I came without objection."* And verse 34 states, *"So Peter opened his mouth and said: '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.'"*

The only way we will rid ourselves and our churches of bigotry and racism is when we recognize that in the gospel we are blind, dead and held captive. We are lost without a Savior. We are fragile and flawed people, broken at every point, and it is God Who came into a world of all colors and races and nations to die for the broken people of the world. He came to give us life and love us back into His family. When we are part of His family, we become brothers and sisters of Christ—not because we share the same skin color or area code or nationality, but because we share the same blood that was shed on the cross by Jesus Christ for us. So let's cut out this racist stuff. Let's get rid of our bigotry as we adopt and hold fast to the gospel.

We've been taught today about ministry. We've learned to listen with humility. And now we've been taught to move beyond bigotry.

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

Note: This transcription has been provided by Sermon Transcribers (www.sermontranscribers.net).