

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*What about those who haven't heard?*"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's Gospel verse-by-verse, and we find ourselves at the end of the account of Jesus meeting the demoniac who said his name was Legion. We've looked at the account extensively, but there's one important aspect we haven't discussed yet and that's the evangelistic part of the end.

I want to begin by sharing something that took place during one of our recent family Bible studies that explains the title of the sermon...

We're still going through Matthew's Gospel. I go a little faster in my family bible studies than I do during sermons on Sunday, but not much. One of the reasons for this is I feel like we end up discussing the Gospel more regularly than I probably ever imagined we would as a family.

If you don't mind me saying, I would recommend that any time your children ask about the Gospel, let that trump whatever you're discussing. If the Holy Spirit is giving your children that interest, drop anything else to satisfy that spiritual hunger and thirst.

So we're having this discussion about the Gospel and Rhea is recognizing the truth of **John 14:6** that Jesus is **the [only] Way** to be saved. So she asks the question that I think all of us have asked at some point:

- *What about those who don't know the Gospel?*
- *How does God reach all these people to save them?*

Basically she asked the title of the sermon: *What about those who haven't heard?*

Listen to these two verses from Isaiah:

- **Isa 50:2b [God says], "Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver?"** This is asking a rhetorical question. It expects a negative answer. In other words, God is saying, **"My hand is long enough to redeem and deliver."**
- **Isa 59:1 Behold, THE LORD'S HAND IS NOT SHORTENED, THAT IT CANNOT SAVE, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear** (hear those who cry out to Him for salvation).

In other words, God is able to save those He wants to save.

If you didn't know better you could almost think there are people spread out over the face of the earth and they're beyond hearing about Jesus and therefore they're doomed to hell.

But Scripture actually says it was God's plan to spread people out over the face of the earth...

- They would seek Him...
- Then He would reveal Himself to them so they could be saved.

Listen to these verses supporting that...

Acts 17:26 [God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, 27 that

they should seek [Him], and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.

This pictures people spread out over the face of the earth – by God Himself – and they’re searching for Him, striving to **find Him**. And He reveals Himself to them.

Listen to these verses communicating something similar...

- **Jer 29:13 You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.**
- **Jam 4:8a Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.**

The obvious question is: *How does God do this?*

- When there are people God wants to save, how does He save them?
- When there are people seeking God, how does He reveal Himself to them?

I’d like to answer this by showing you some examples from Scripture!

Our first example is in **Luke 8**. Let’s pick up at **verse 34** to get the context...

34 When the herdsmen saw what had happened (the pigs running over the cliff), **they fled and told it in the city and in the country. 35 Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid** (so they didn’t find their pigs, but they did find this man delivered from the demons). **36 And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. 37 Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned.**

They wanted Jesus to leave, and He left. In my mind, this is the worst decision a group of people corporately made in all of Scripture. Wherever Jesus went He brought blessing to the people through teaching, healing, and miracles...but these people lost out on all that.

38 The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him (so he begged Jesus to go w/ Him), **but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.**

Jesus granted the request of the demons when they wanted to enter the pigs, and He granted the request of the townspeople when they asked Him to leave. But interestingly He didn’t grant the request of this man, who became one of His disciples.

And this made a pretty great reversal:

- The man was previously unable to live at home, forced to live among tombs, but now he’s told to **return home**.

- This man was sent away by the townspeople, but now he's sent back to these same townspeople.

In **verse 39** look at the words **declare how much God has done for you**. I want you to notice two things...

First, even though Jesus said to tell people what God did for him, after that it says **[the man proclaimed] throughout the whole city how much JESUS HAD DONE FOR HIM**.

- He clearly thought Jesus was God; he saw no difference between Jesus and God.
- And He was right; there's no contradiction, because Jesus is God.

Second, in telling the man to go and tell others what happened, this is actually the opposite of what Jesus normally did:

- Normally He said, "Don't tell anyone."
- This time He says, "Tell everyone."

The reason for the difference is the location...

When Jesus was in Israel He wanted to keep preaching in all the towns, and if the news spread of His miracles He wouldn't be able to enter the towns to preach. There's an example of that happening in **Mark 1**...

Mark 1:44 [Jesus said to a man He healed], "See that you say nothing to anyone...." 45 But he went out and...spread the news, so that Jesus could NO LONGER OPENLY ENTER A TOWN, BUT WAS OUT IN DESOLATE PLACES.

Because this man told everyone what Jesus did for him, everyone flocked to Jesus and He was unable to enter the towns in Israel to preach.

But in this account Jesus isn't in Israel:

- He's in Gentile territory...
- He's going to be leaving the area soon...

So He needed this man to stay behind and tell these unbelieving people about Him. They united to reject Jesus, so they definitely needed a missionary and this man served that purpose.

This was gracious of Jesus. He returned evil with kindness. He could've completely abandoned them, but He sent this man back and it brings us to Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: FOR EVERY (PART I) VILLAGE IN THE GERASENS, THERE'S "A MAN FROM WHOM THE DEMONS HAD GONE."

I can't tell you the demoniac's name, b/c Scripture doesn't give us his name, but twice this is what he's called:

- **35 Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found THE MAN FROM WHOM THE DEMONS HAD GONE...**
- **38 THE MAN FROM WHOM THE DEMONS HAD GONE begged that he might be with him...**

In verse 30 Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion,” but this is his new name!

Maybe for the rest of his life this is how everyone referred to him. This would be a perfect name for him b/c it would remind everyone what Jesus did for him. And this is one of the three reasons he makes such a great missionary...

First, he had a powerful testimony among these people...

- They knew him...
- They knew what he was...
- And now they see how he’s changed...

Every time they saw him it reminded them of what God did for Him and it gave God glory.

The second reason he’s a great missionary is he could speak from experience. He didn’t have to tell people what the Lord did for others. He could tell people what the Lord did for him.

The third reason he’s a great missionary is he’s indigenous:

- He’s one of these people.
- This was a Gentile area, and this man could be a light to them in a way Jesus and the disciples could not, since they were Jews.

The main point I want you to see is the Lord wanted to reach these people who hadn’t heard, and He had no problem doing that through this man!

For the other three examples of the way God reaches those who haven’t heard, we’re going to look at the Book of Acts. Before we turn there I want to tell you why this is such a fitting transition...

In many ways Luke is the book most closely associated to Acts:

- Luke and Acts were written by Luke, which also means they’re the only books written by a Gentile.
- Acts is really a continuation of Luke; Acts picks up right where Luke left off. In many respects, Acts is like, “Luke – Part II.
- Acts and Luke are the two most evangelistic books in the NT, and they both show God’s love for the Gentiles. As a Gentile, you can imagine Luke’s heart for the Gentiles, and it comes through in his books.

The end of the passage we’re looking at really sort of prefigures Acts:

- Acts is the book of evangelism and missionary work, and that’s what we’re seeing in these verses.

- Jesus was a Jew and He spent most of His time in Israel among the Jews...His people. But in this passage:
 - He left Jewish territory to enter Gentile territory.
 - He went all the way across the Lake of Galilee and endured that terrible storm to reach the Gerasens.
 - To go a little further, He's actually among a bunch of pig farmers, which is about as non-Jewish as you can get.
 - He looks like a missionary as He reaches out to these foreign, unsaved people.

He shows a concern for the Gentiles that truly comes into focus in Acts...but it's clearly foreshadowed here.

Let me show you the next example of the Lord reaching those who haven't heard. Please turn to **Acts 8:5**...

As I read these verses I want you to consider how successful **Philip's** ministry looked...

5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. 6 And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.

This is what you call a powerful, thriving ministry.

Interestingly, God actually called Philip away from all this! Look at **verse 26**...

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place.

God only gave Philip the first step. He simply said, "Head south!"

- Philip didn't know what to look for...
- He didn't know why he was going...

It's somewhat like when God sent out Abraham.

Notice the words **This is a desert place.**

Interestingly God called **Philip** away from a thriving ministry to a desert! What's characteristic of deserts? No people! God took him away from a huge number of people to send him to someplace barren. This didn't seem to make sense from a human perspective, but the people in **verses 5-7** had heard, and now God wanted to send him to people who hadn't heard.

Look at **verse 27**...

27 And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

It says he was **coming from Jerusalem**, which is where the temple was, but as a eunuch – according to **Deut 23:1** – he didn't have access. But that didn't discourage him. He didn't quit in his desire to know God.

And God satisfies his desire. Look at **verse 29**...

29 And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.”

Philip received step 2 and this brings us to Part II of Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: FOR EVERY (PART II) ETHIOPIAN THERE'S A PHILIP.

Look at Philip's response after getting the command...

30 So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

Philip didn't waste any time. Maybe he ran b/c he was excited, or maybe he ran to keep up w/ the chariot.

31 And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

I really appreciate the Ethiopian's humility. He had no problem admitting he didn't understand something. Nobody should ever feel bad when they're confused by Scripture.

32 Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

**“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he opens not his mouth.**

33 In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth.”

34 And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?”

This is what you call an open door!

I think this can be a comforting passage. Whenever you meet people who are confused by God's Word, take them to this and show them that this man didn't even know one of the clearest descriptions of Jesus in the entire OT was about Jesus.

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news (or Gospel) about Jesus.

And just like that God reached this Ethiopian who hadn't heard. But in a sense, He really reached Ethiopia. This man is w/ the queen, and he's going to return w/ her to the country. This puts the Gospel there like the Lord put the Gospel in the Gerasens in **Luke 8**.

Next turn to **Acts 16:6**...

I want you to watch everything God did to get Paul where He wanted him to go...

6 And they (this is Paul and his traveling companions) went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. 7 And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

Just like the previous account w/ Philip, you see God doing a lot of work to get Paul where He wants him to go!

And at this point Paul has no idea where he's going. He's just learning where he's not supposed to go. We're going to skip ahead, so let me just tell you what happened...

Paul received a vision telling him to go to Macedonia. Look at **verse 13**...

13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.

I'll say this loosely - b/c the Scripture doesn't make it absolutely clear - but more than likely these women were out here b/c there was no synagogue. Since ten Jewish men were needed for a synagogue, it seems like in the entire city of Philippi they didn't even have that.

But even though these women didn't have any godly men in their lives, God still met them w/ the Gospel...from the Apostle Paul himself.

One of the women is singled out...

14 One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

And this brings us to Lesson 1, Part III...

LESSON 1: FOR EVERY (PART III) LYDIA THERE'S A PAUL.

I love the way the verse says **the Lord opened her heart**. Many times when I'm praying for people's salvation, I will pray these words that God opens their hearts like He did w/ Lydia.

You've heard me say before that no matter how hard we might try, we can't reach into people's hearts and plant the Gospel there. We can share the Gospel, but beyond that all we can do is pray that God open their hearts for them to receive it.

Before we move on from this account, there's something fascinating I want you to notice...

Back up to **verse 6**, and halfway through the verse look at the words **having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia**.

This isn't what we think of as Asia. This is modern-day Turkey, and it's where the seven churches in Rev 2 and 3 were located. But those churches hadn't been planted yet, so there must have been lots of people in the area that needed to hear the Gospel.

It says Paul wanted to preach **the word** – or Gospel – to them, but it also says the **Holy Spirit forbid** him, and then **the Spirit of Jesus** – another name for the Holy Spirit – **did not allow [him]**.

It's interesting to me that God had Paul bypass thousands of unsaved people, so that what? So he could reach these women!

When you look at this account – and the other accounts we're considering – you see God has a clear plan for the spread of the Gospel. It's not arbitrary. He knows how He wants to reach those who haven't heard.

For our last example, please turn to **Acts 10**...

This is a fairly long account, so instead of reading all of it, let me summarize what took place...

- Peter had a vision of a sheet coming down from heaven filled w/ all kinds of unclean animals.
- A voice told him to eat, but he refused saying he'd never eaten anything unclean before.
- The vision took place three times, and then Peter went on his way.

Look at **verse 17**...

17 Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean...

Even though the vision took place three times, it really confused Peter. It even continued to affect him after it was over.

Then some men came to take Peter to the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion. Cornelius had gathered his family and close friends together. Look at **verse 27**...

27 And as he (this is Peter) talked with him (Cornelius), he went in and found many persons gathered. 28 And he (Peter) said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.”

Peter’s point is there’s no way he’d ever enter the home of a Roman, say nothing about a Roman centurion. But what convinced him? The vision God gave him.

Even though it previously confused him, now he knows it was God’s way of showing him the Gentiles – like Cornelius and those w/ him – shouldn’t be considered **unclean**. So Peter preaches the Gospel to them to get rid of their spiritual uncleanness.

And this brings us to the last part of Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: FOR EVERY (PART IV) CORNELIUS THERE’S A PETER

Look at **verse 39** to see Peter preach to Cornelius and all those gathered w/ him...

39 And we are witnesses of all that he (this is Jesus] did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, 40 but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, 41 not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

Peter told them about the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, which is really to say he preached the Gospel to them...and they were saved. This chapter is Gentile Pentecost.

Make sure you notice that just like God went to great lengths to get...

- Philip to the Ethiopian...
- Paul to Lydia...

He went to great lengths to get Cornelius to Peter!

It’s not an easy thing to get a committed Jew – like Peter – into the home of a Roman centurion, but God didn’t have any trouble doing that. He can easily reach those who haven’t heard.

Let me tell you something else interesting...

We didn’t read it, but after God gave Peter the vision of the sheet, He also gave Cornelius a vision of an angel that told him to send men to get Peter. So here’s the point...

While God was working to get Peter to Cornelius, He was also working to get Cornelius to get Peter!

And this brings us to Lesson 2...

LESSON 2: GOD WORKS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE EQUATION.

In these accounts we mostly see one side of the equation...

- We see how God brought Philip to the Ethiopian...
- We see how God brought Paul to Lydia...
- We see how God brought Peter to Cornelius...

But...

- What was the Ethiopian doing before Philip reached him?
 - He was reading Isaiah 53!
 - Do you think God was working on that side of the equation?
- What was Lydia doing before Paul arrived?
 - Praying and worshiping!
 - Working on that side of the equation too.

So let me tell you two things that encourage me, and hopefully encourage you too...

First, if God leads you to share the Gospel w/ people – I'm not saying those people are always going to get saved right in front of you – but you can be encouraged He's been working on that side of the equation too.

Second, we should see ourselves like the people in Lesson 1...

- The man from whom the demons had gone...
- Philip...
- Paul...
- Peter...

Because there's some...

- Gerasens...
- Ethiopian...
- Lydia...
- Cornelius...

God wants us to reach!

Maybe it's in your workplace, your marriage, or even your family, you are someone's Philip, Paul, or Peter!

- God doesn't save us just for us.
- This is why we're still here.
- There are more people to reach w/ the Gospel!

So let me encourage you to pray and ask God:

- Who are those people in your life that God wants you to reach?
- Who are those people who haven't heard, but God wants to use you for them to hear?

I want to conclude by sharing something w/ you that's always fascinated me about this account w/ Cornelius. This is going to involve backing up to the beginning of the chapter, but it's best to do it

this way b/c if I hadn't already showed you the end of the account, you might not believe what I'm going to tell you.

Look at **verse 1**...

1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, 2 a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God.

As far as godly people go, it's pretty hard to beat the description of Cornelius that's contained in **verse 2**:

- It says he's a **devout man**, which means he's religious.
- It says he **feared God**, which Proverbs says is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom.
- It says **all his household**, which means he was a strong spiritual leader.
- It says he **gave alms generously to the people**, so he was loving and giving.
- Finally it says he **prayed continually to God**. He had a wonderful prayer life!

Now what if I told you that despite all this Cornelius wasn't saved?

- You probably wouldn't believe me would you?
- You'd probably say, "*There no way a man like this isn't going to heaven!*"

That's exactly what I'm saying, and that's exactly what the Bible says. The rest of the chapter is a record of God bringing the Gospel to this man so he could be saved.

If Cornelius had been a Christian...

- God wouldn't have had to go through all that trouble of giving Peter the dream...
- Peter wouldn't have had to go through all that trouble of going to Cornelius' house...

So the obvious question is:

- Why wasn't he saved?
- How could a man look this good...and not be saved?

The answer brings us to our last lesson...

LESSON 3: NO AMOUNT OF GOOD WORKS CAN SAVE.

Everything it says about Cornelius in **verse 2** is great, but those are works, and works don't save.

- No amount of works can remove even one sin.
- If that were possible, Jesus would have died in vain.

Cornelius is one of my favorite examples in Scripture of this truth:

- You can be as **devout** as Cornelius...
- You can be as **generous** as Cornelius...
- You can be as **prayerful** as Cornelius...

And not be saved, b/c salvation has never been about how good or how religious you are!

The way of salvation is contained in **verse 43**...

43 To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him (Jesus) receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” 44 While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.

After Cornelius and those w/ him **heard the word** – which is to say heard the Gospel – they received **the Holy Spirit**. But what couldn't save him before this?

- No amount of religion.
- No amount of works.
- No amount of giving.
- No amount of praying.

He had to believe in Christ.

Let me close w/ this quote...

Ben Peays says, “Salvation is a gift from God, so experiencing the new birth is also a gift from God. We are unable to do this on our own. We are not saved by works. God makes the first move. He stirs, He causes, He reaches out to us in love to make this happen. Just as babies are unable to cause themselves to be born physically, we are unable to cause ourselves to be born spiritually.”

This is why it's so important that those who haven't heard...hear! No matter what they've done, until they've believed, they are unsaved!

If you've been trusting in your own righteousness – instead of trusting in Christ – or if you have any questions about anything I said in this sermon, Pastor Doug and I will be up front after service and we'd consider it a privilege to speak w/ you.

Let's pray.