

The Appointment Series

by

Rev Dr Edgar Mayer

Six messages with introduction on Acts 10 for new Christians
and those that need to revisit the foundations of the Christian faith.

The Appointment Introduction – Arranged

A member of our church was driving to a certain town. He was crossing a bridge when he felt an “inner urging” – an “unexplainable burden” – to turn back, make time and visit someone on an outlying farm. He came just in time to prevent a suicide. Another member of our church – a young woman – drove up the range to Toowoomba when the gearbox of her car broke down which left her stranded on the highway – just around a dangerous bend. Not knowing what to do – she got out of the car. Confused and upset – she didn’t quite realize how big trucks were braking and swerving to avoid hitting her. Just then still another member of our church – our evangelist David Challenor and a friend – also came up the range, recognized the trouble she was in, stopped and came to her rescue. They saved her from the oncoming traffic and – because they were strong men – they were able to push the car – uphill – out of the way. Was this just a coincidence? Was it just lucky that the right people came at the right time? Was the “inner urging” or “unexplainable burden” which made the other man turn his car and rescue a farmer from self-harm – was this also simply good fortune or could it be that someone else – God himself – had a hand in setting up these meetings?

In the same way could it be that you yourself are not here in this building – listening to this message – by accident? Could it be that God is setting up a meeting with you? On the surface you may be here because your parents made you come or you could not refuse a friend or maybe you are curious about church or whatever reason. Yet, could it be that the real reason that you are here is because God loves you and he made the circumstances conspire to get you here because he wants to meet you – set you up for an encounter with him.

According to the Bible this is how God works. A man – he was called Philip – told his brother Nathaniel that they found the promised Saviour – John 1:45 – I read from the Bible: “... We have found the one ... – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Yet, the brother was skeptical, saying – John 1:46: “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” I continue reading this Bible account – John 1:46-51: “... ‘Come and see,’ said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathaniel approaching, he said to him, ‘Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.’ ‘How do you know me?’ Nathaniel asked. Jesus answered, ‘I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.’ Then Nathaniel declared, ‘Rabbi [Teacher], you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.’ ... “Jesus knew Nathaniel before anything happened because God the Father set up a meeting with him. On the surface level Philip made Nathaniel check out Jesus – his enthusiasm dented Nathaniel’s scepticism – but on a deeper level nothing was by accident. God the Father had already given Jesus a prophetic vision of Nathaniel sitting under a fig tree and showed him that Nathaniel was a man in whom there was nothing false. The meeting was arranged and when Jesus shared with Nathaniel what was revealed to him, Nathaniel was amazed and declared: “You are the Son of God.”

At another time a short man was desperate to see Jesus and therefore he climbed up a tree to see over the heads of other people and see Jesus walking by. Then this happened – Luke 19:5: “When Jesus reached the spot [where the desperate man was], he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay in your house today.’” Jesus’ behaviour leaves us in no doubt. The meeting was arranged. Jesus knew beforehand when to stop and look up. He knew the man’s name – even though they had not been introduced – and he knew that he needed to stay in his house for the night. God had set up an encounter which ended with Jesus saying to Zacchaeus – Luke 19:9: “Today salvation has come to this house ... For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” Therefore, I encourage you: Pay attention to what may look like a coincidence. It may be God setting up a meeting with you.

A most radical version of what God is doing here is found in the Bible chapter of Acts 10. For the next six messages we will stay with this one Bible chapter because it records the conversion of Cornelius – the first believer outside of God’s nation Israel – and therefore this Bible account is foundational in character (the good news had to be explained to him from scratch) – well suited to be foundational for us. We will learn a lot about what it means to become and be a Christian. But for now – as an introduction – notice how – once again – the meeting was arranged. God is calling you.

I read from the Bible – Acts 10:1-6: “At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, ‘Cornelius!’ Cornelius stared at him in fear. ‘What is it, Lord?’ he asked. The angel answered, ‘Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a

memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.”

Angels and demons are real and in this instance God made an angel appear to Cornelius in a vision and had this angel convey instructions to Cornelius which set him up to meet a man by the name of Peter and hear the preaching of this man Peter. However, this was not all. I read a few more verses – Acts 10:9-23: “About noon the following day ... Peter [in Joppa] went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance [and I skip now what he saw precisely except to say that the punchline was this:] The voice [from heaven] spoke to him a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ This happened three times ... While Peter was wondering about the meaning of this vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon’s house was and stopped at the gate. They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there. 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.’ ... “

Not only did Cornelius see an angel and get instructions from an angel, Peter – while fasting and praying – fell into a trance, saw a vision and heard a voice from heaven. Then, the Spirit impressed on him (maybe this time it was an inner voice) that three men were looking for him and he should go with them. Even Christians today have these experiences of trances, seeing visions, hearing God audibly (for instance, one our members and even a Lutheran pastor colleague) and receiving impressions by the Holy Spirit. And the Bible encourages all of us – 1 Corinthians 14:1: “ ... eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy [in all of its various manifestations].” Therefore, you can also have these experiences. In fact, God wants to communicate with you through these channels. However, in the account of Cornelius God was pulling out all stops – compounded the prophetic experiences – to ensure that everyone knew that he was behind this encounter which would break new ground. Even people outside God’s nation Israel – men like Cornelius – were meant to be saved because Jesus also died for them. This was new. They were not clean (did not follow God’s holiness code – ate unclean food) but the voice from heaven told Peter: “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

God did not save Cornelius by accident and he is not offering you salvation in some sort of chance encounter – a fluke meeting. God knows you and he is making an effort in arranging a meeting with you – that you may hear the good news of his Son Jesus Christ. Anticipate something worthy of God for you. Amen.

The Appointment 1 – Peace Through Him

Cornelius – a man from Caesarea – a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment – **he became the first believer outside of God’s nation Israel. God had set up a meeting with him** – as God also wants to set up a meeting with you – **and the way the meeting between God and Cornelius was going to take place was through the preaching of Peter** (one of the key church leaders) **who resided at that time in Joppa** – a seven hour walk down the coast from Caesarea (from the place of Cornelius). **Just imagine: All that trouble only to hear a sermon! Remember what happened: An angel had been summoned to speak to Cornelius in Caesarea, the next day Peter fell into a trance in Joppa** (during prayer and fasting), **being in that trance Peter had a vision from heaven concerning Cornelius** – heard a voice from heaven – **and then had the Spirit impress on him guidance** (that he was to go with the men that Cornelius had sent) – **so much was going on and all of that (and more) to set up a preaching engagement! Just imagine ... Take hold of this because you are – also – listening to some preaching right now. God is also wanting to meet with you.**

What, then, did Peter preach? What would be the very first sermon that any unbeliever needs to hear? If you are a Christian or know something of the Christian faith – how would you start the message of salvation? This is what Peter did – Acts 10:24-36 – **I read from the Bible:** “The following day Peter arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting him ... As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. ‘Stand up,’ he said, ‘I am only a man myself.’ Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them: ‘... May I ask you why you sent for me?’ Cornelius answered: ‘Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea. So I sent for you immediately, and it was good for you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God listening to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.’ Then Peter began to speak: ‘... This is the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all ... ”

There! Before I read any further – did you pick up on how Peter began his preaching? What do you need to know before anything else? What does every person on this planet need to know? Peter said: “This is the message ... telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ ... “ **Peace through Jesus Christ! Do you think that this is what you need most – peace? Can you buy anything with peace or make a name for yourself with peace? What’s the value of peace? We get to that.**

This is how Peter continued preaching his sermon to Cornelius – Acts 10:36-43 – **I read from the Bible:** “This is the message ... peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism which John preached [this was a baptism of repentance] – how God anointed [blessed] Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree [nailed him to a cross], but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Jesus was about peace but these few Bible verses portray that the road to peace was not easy. On the contrary – Jesus began his work by – so the Bible says here – “doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil”. (Did you know?) **There is a devil and he is not nice and he has power and what he does to people needs undoing and healing. Then Jesus himself was killed. How could that happen? This is not evidence of peace on earth but confirms that we humans have it in us to rage at the wrong time** – against God. **But Jesus** – then – **beat our common enemy** – death. **There is not much peace thinking about death, but Jesus overcame death because God raised him up on the third day.**

On the third day Jesus gained authority over the grave and then summed up again our situation – the basic lack of peace at the core of our existence – the reason why we are under the power of the devil, rebellion and death. **I repeat words from the close of Peter’s sermon:** “... God raised him from the dead on the third day ... he commanded us to preach and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead ... everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” **This is**

what we need to hear. This is what we need to have resolved. There is going to be a day of judgement and Jesus will be the judge and the problem is that none of us here will pass this day of judgement unscathed – we will remain under the power of the devil and death – unless we believe in Jesus Christ and therefore receive forgiveness of sins through his name – peace with God through him. Do you have peace with God? Are you sure?

Dr Maurice Rawlings, a specialist in internal medicine and cardiovascular diseases, wrote a book on his findings from resuscitating individuals who had been considered clinically dead. One of his patients was a forty-eight-year old white male, of medium build, dark haired and with a personality that would please anyone. He had a cardiac arrest and dropped dead right in his office. A complete heartblock had occurred. After frantic treatment the patient began “coming to”. But whenever Dr Rawlings would reach for his instruments, the patient would again lose consciousness, stop breathing and die once more.

Each time he regained heartbeat and respiration, the patient screamed: “I am in hell!” He was terrified and pleaded with the doctor to help him which in turn scared him to death. The patient then issued a strange plea: “Don’t stop!” Usually most patients – as soon as they recover consciousness – tell Dr Rawlings: “Take your hands off my chest, you’re hurting me!” He is a big man and his method of external heart massage sometimes fractures ribs. But this patient was telling him: “Don’t stop!” The doctor noticed a genuinely alarmed look on his face. He had a terrified look. Sheer horror in his eyes. Then still another strange thing happened. He said: “Don’t you understand? I am in hell. Each time you quit I go back to hell! Don’t let me go back to hell!”

Being accustomed to patients under this kind of emotional stress, the doctor dismissed his complaint and told him to keep his “hell” to himself. He remembers telling him: “I’m busy. Don’t bother me about your hell until I finish getting this pacemaker into place.” But the man was serious. He was in panic. After several death episodes he finally asked him: “How do I stay out of hell?” Dr Rawlings told him that he guessed it was the same principle learned in Sunday school – that he guessed Jesus Christ would be the one whom you would ask to save you. Then the patient said: “I don’t know how. Pray for me.” The doctor thought: “Pray for him! What nerve!” He told him that he was a doctor, not a preacher. But he repeated his plea: “Pray for me” (Maurice Rawlings: Beyond Death’s Door, Bantam edition 1979, p1-4).

This is how the story continues. Dr Rawlings writes: “‘Pray for me!’ he repeated. I knew I had no choice. It was a dying man’s request. So I had him repeat the words after me as we worked – right there on the floor. It was a very simple prayer because I did not know much about praying. It went something like this: *Lord Jesus, I ask you to keep me out of hell. Forgive my sins. I turn my life over to you. If I die, I want to go to heaven. If I live, I’ll be ‘on the hook’ forever*” meaning “I’ll remain faithful to you forever.” (Maurice Rawlings: Beyond Death’s Door, Bantam edition 1979, p5).

The patient survived and is now a strong Christian. After he had recovered he remembered the prayer and he also remembered that during one of the subsequent death episodes he was meeting both his mother and step-mother and other relatives who had died before. The meeting place was a gorge full of beautiful colours – brilliant illumination by a huge beam of light. In this after-death experience he “saw” his mother for the first time. She had died at age twenty-one when he was fifteen months old. This man had never even seen a picture of his real mother, and yet he was able to identify a photograph of her only a few weeks later. The face was identical to the lady he saw in his experience. Remarkable! What a turn around from his former panic. Oddly enough he no longer remembered any of his earlier impressions of hell but the experience was real enough.

What do you make of this? This man that died had a pleasing personality. People thought that he was a good man – but – unbeknown to him – he had no peace with God. When he was still breathing, he did not think much about God – was not anxious – did not worry – but when his heart stopped beating, he was going to a terrible place – the place that was not heaven. He cried out: “Don’t you understand? I am in hell. Each time you quit I go back to hell! Don’t let me go back to hell!” He experienced the consequences of his lack of peace with God.

What about you? In a few years you will also die and then face eternity. You may not think much about it. We have ways of avoiding the issue but you will die – I will die. Are you ready? Do you have peace – with God – which then allows you entry into an eternal life with him? We can spend a lifetime amassing things – money, houses, cars, jewelry – and we may be proud of our achievements – our

reputation – or we may bum our life away – but in the end none of this matters. One day – in a moment – you will leave this earth – naked and alone – and then face judgement by a holy God. Do you measure up to his holiness? Will you pass the judgement because you have peace with him?

Let me backtrack at this point. The whole matter of peace with God may still not be on your radar screen – it may not seem practical enough (for today) – but the Bible teaches that any lack of peace even in your life right now – any anxiety, any family strife, any fear of the future, anything – can be traced back to your basic lack of peace with him. When God created the world, he made the world perfect. The Bible records – Genesis 1:31: “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good ...” – very good – with no sin or evil. Then, God took the first human couple – Adam and Eve – and placed them in a garden and he said to them – Genesis 2:16-17: “... You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from [this one certain tree over here. It was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.] ...” “Life in that garden was perfect and they lived with God. Yet, both – Adam and Eve – disobeyed and did what God said not to do. They ate from the one tree – for whatever reason. Then, this is what happened. Life – as we know it – began. No peace, no peace, no peace.”

I read from the Bible – Genesis 3:7: “... they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” Adam and Eve sinned and immediately suffered from shame – to the extent that they could no longer face each other without covering up. Ask yourself: What are we covering up from each other? What if people knew the real me? Feeling shame is not peace.

I read the next two Bible verses – Genesis 3:8-9: “Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’” God was the first to ask the question which is bothering us to this day: “Where are you? Who are you?” Can we answer this question for ourselves: “Who am I?” Before Adam and Eve sinned, this was no problem. They were God’s creations and loved by him and placed where he wanted them to be – enjoying what he designed them to be – tending a beautiful garden – satisfied with their given lives. But then sin cut them off from God and who they were in him.

And worse was to come. God challenged them about what they had done but none of them owned up to their guilt – which is a word that we also don’t use much any more. Adam and Eve lost their peace with God and then with each other. I read again from the Bible – Genesis 3:12: “[Challenged by God] the man said, ‘The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.’” Adam blamed his wife and compounded the blame by even implicating God, saying: “The woman you put here with me – she is at fault.” What happened to Adam and Eve’s love? Instead of acknowledging her as his wife (cf. Genesis 3:23: “... bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh ...”), Adam distanced himself from her. He sinned and then his wife became “the woman put here with me”. These two lost their harmony – their peace – their joy. And human history went from there. Even their first two sons – Cain and Abel – copied their behaviour. Cain suffered tension with God but then – instead of acknowledging his guilt – he killed his brother (cf. Genesis 4).

Shame, hiding from God, blaming each other, confusion over identity – “Where are you? Who are you?” – and more come from a basic lack of peace with God. Therefore, Peter began his sermon to Cornelius with these words, saying (preaching the good news) – Acts 10:36: “... This is the message ... peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all ...” “Peace through Jesus Christ” with God and then flowing from this peace – this restoration of our relationship with God – also peace in every other area of your life. Another Bible passage – Colossians 3:10 – talks about the peace of God ruling our hearts and Philippians 4:6-7 promises: “Don’t be anxious about anything ... with thanksgiving, present your requests to God ... the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” This is practical right now. Have peace with God through Jesus Christ and there will be peace – a sense of calm and rest – for every other area of your life – for all of eternity.

How then do you get that peace? Listen again to Peter’s sermon to Cornelius: “This is the message ... peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all ... They killed him by hanging him on a tree [nailed him to a cross], but God raised him from the dead on the third day ... He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead ... everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” There is “peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all”. Therefore – right now – accept Jesus (the bringer of peace) as your Lord which means that you allow him to be in charge of your life. Then – and this is how Peter concluded his sermon – “everyone who

believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name”. **Believe in him which means: trust him and the power of his name and who he is and trust that he is providing what you need the most: forgiveness of your sins and therefore peace with God. This is by faith in him** – not by fixing anything ourselves. **Peace is through Jesus Christ** (not through us) – **through what he has done** (not through what we have done) – a free gift for all of us. **Accept Jesus as your Lord and believe in him. He is good and you will have peace.**

In closing, I want to read another Bible passage to introduce Jesus to you further – Colossians 1:15-23. **Peace with God is through Jesus Christ. We love him. I read:** “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation – if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel ... “

If you want peace, look to Jesus. He was before all things – filled with all the fullness of God – **and then made peace through his blood, shed on a cross. Because his physical body was put to death, you are – or can be – holy in the sight of God, without blemish and free from accusation – if you continue in your faith that is: if you continue to trust him** – Jesus Christ. **Therefore, this is the message: Peace with God through Jesus Christ. Look to him. Amen.**

The Appointment 2 – A Good Turn

Cornelius became a Christian. How did this happen? What makes a Christian? What makes you a Christian? The short answer is: God. Everything begins with him and so also in the case of Cornelius. God was the one that arranged the meeting between Cornelius and Peter who would preach to him and God was the one that provided the means of salvation – sending “the message ... of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all” (Acts 10:36). Therefore, the short answer is that God makes you a Christian. He makes salvation happen but – if you are not yet a Christian – this needs unpacking in order to become more practical and personal.

We have another look at Cornelius. Peter preached to him and the beginning and ending of his sermon give us important clues as to what makes a Christian – Acts 10:36-43 – I read from the Bible (Peter said): “ ... peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all ... We are witnesses of everything ... They killed Jesus by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

These are the keys – listen again: “ ... Jesus Christ . is Lord of all ... everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” Therefore – point one – let Jesus be your Lord which means: let him be in charge of your life. The Bible declares in a most radical way – 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: “ ... you are not your own; you were bought at a price ... “ Jesus died – for you. He gave his life – for you – as a sacrifice (payment) for your sins and you were not a bargain for him but cost him everything – betrayal, torture, death (on a cross). Love made him pay the price but now you are his and you want to be his. He is your Lord and with him there is peace with God.

Then – point two – put your faith in your Lord. Do not dishonour him by doubting his promises: “ ... everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” Accept his goodness – his mercy – his forgiveness – by faith – for you. In summary then – from the preaching of Peter – we learn that in order to become a Christian we are to let Jesus be our Lord and have faith in him. We obey and take him by his word.

Can you do that – with the help of God? Are you willing? When other people heard about Cornelius and how he became a Christian, they used another word to describe his experience. They said – Acts 11:18: “ ... God has granted [him] ... repentance unto life.” This one word “repentance” is an even more concise summary of what is involved in becoming a Christian. What makes a Christian? Repentance (which is granted as a gift from God).

This goes deep and not everyone understands how deep this goes. There are many who think that they are Christians when in fact they are not because they do not understand repentance. What these people take from the preaching of Peter is that Jesus died for our sins and therefore we can be forgiven – they believe that and they feel comfortable in their knowledge – but they forget that Jesus is not only our Saviour. He is our Lord (as Peter also preached).

Christians are coming under new management – his management – which requires repentance – the turning away from everything wrong in our lives toward him. The Bible is tackling people who claim that they put their trust in Jesus but then no actions back up their claim. They are not in touch with him at all. They don’t know him. The Bible confronts them, saying – James 2:18-19: “ ... Show me your faith without deeds ... You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.” The Bible challenges anyone, saying: “How can you believe and not have some sort of reaction to the true God? The demons know him and therefore they shudder in terror of his holiness and might but you claim to believe in him and know him and yet, ignore him.” The Bible says: “This is useless” James 2:20: “ ... faith without deeds is useless [– dead].” No actions betray that you know nothing about God.

Cornelius was not like this. The Bible introduced him with these words – Acts 10:2: “He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.” Later the messengers to Peter gave the same assessment, saying – Acts 10:22: “ ... Cornelius ... is a righteous and God-fearing man ... “ At last Peter himself was preaching this about Cornelius – Acts 10:34-35: “ ... God ... accepts [those] ... who fear him and do what is right.”

Cornelius – at that stage – **had not yet been saved** – he had not yet heard about Jesus – **but he knew enough about God to be God-fearing, that is: to humble himself before him and serve him with reverence. Do we know what Cornelius knew or does he seem a little strange to us?**

By the way – he did not get everything right in his God-fearing attitude. When the angel visited him, the Bible records that “he stared at him in fear” (Acts 10:4). He became scared which is not the same as fearing God and when he entered Peter’s house, he “fell at Peter’s feet in reverence” (Acts 10:25). This was misdirected and therefore Peter said to him – Acts 10:26: “Stand up. I am only a man myself.” Yet, Cornelius got more right than wrong. He knew how to be humble and honour in holy awe what God was doing in his life. He needed more knowledge – he needed Peter preaching to him about Jesus – **but the attitude was right and if you want to be a Christian, you have to recover some of that for yourself. What makes a Christian? Repentance – the turning away from sin to the God whom we fear in holy reverence.**

A man spoke to his pastor on the phone and confided in him, saying: “Never in my life have I ever been so utterly terrified. For God’s reasons alone God began to deal with sin in my life. God has brought up things that I have not thought about for years and years. He has brought up things from my youth that I have never dealt with in my life – things that have affected my marriage and my assignment. God was relentless for three weeks bringing to mind what he sees as sin and how serious it is with him. I came to the place a few days ago where I cried out to God and asked why God was doing this to me. God said to me, ‘Because you have lost the fear of me I am doing this.’” The question is: Does God have to do the same to us because we have likewise lost the fear of him.

The pastor listened to the man and then wrote down his conclusions: “When you do not fear God, you will not fear sin. There is a direct relationship between a high view of God and a high view of sin. A low view of God brings a low view of sin. When there is no fear of God, there is no fear of sin. It is amazing to me the number of people who can sin grievously against the Word of God ... It amazes me how so many people somehow believe that as long as they do not feel that something is bad, that it is not bad – as long as they can feel okay about it, they can continue to do it ...” (Henry Blackaby: Holiness, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers 2003, p9-10).

No. Peter concluded his sermon by telling Cornelius – Acts 10:42: “... Jesus Christ is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.” **Judgement is coming and the standard will be the holiness of God – perfect righteousness. **Nothing will be compromised and the only reason that we will escape condemnation is the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for us. As Peter also said – Acts 10:43: “... everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”** **None of our sins will be excused. They will be forgiven because someone else suffered the punishment for our sins on our behalf – Jesus on the cross: wounded and tortured – for us.****

God forgives us but he doesn’t change his nature which is holy. Therefore – we can never separate faith from repentance – ongoing repentance – making room for his holiness. **Jesus himself declared that this is at the heart of the Christian experience. After he rose from the dead, he summed up the message of salvation with these words – Luke 24:46-47: “... repentance and forgiveness of sins [flowing from repentance] will be preached in his name ...”** **Therefore – later – when the disciples preached their first sermon and the people asked them – Acts 2:37: “... what shall we do”, there could only be one answer. The disciples said – Acts 2:38: “Repent ...”** **All of us here – understand who you are dealing with and how much you need to be saved. Turn away from sin and turn toward Jesus in holy fear.**

I want to make another point clear. People said about Cornelius that – (I remind us of this verse) Acts 11:18: “... God . granted [him] ... repentance unto life.” **God grants repentance. It is always God that makes you a Christian. Without him setting up an appointment with you and without him tugging at your heart, nothing would ever happen. In the same way – understand that God keeps granting repentance to you as you keep turning towards him and what he wants. The Bible says – Philippians 2:12-13: “. my dear friends, as you have always obeyed [as you have always kept yourself turned toward God] ... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” **For the duration of our entire life on earth – we continue to work on repentance with fear and trembling because our God is a holy God – but – we are not doing this in our own strength. It is he who works in us to will and to act according to his good purpose.****

May I also add that the deep motivation for being so committed to God-fearing holiness is not just that we want to be saved and be secure in eternity. We are fascinated by God. He loves us with the kind of crazy love that even dies on the cross in shame – for us – flawed people like us. God is so pure in

his love and this pure love – the total lack of selfishness – **is precisely his holiness** – his nature which knows no shadow or sin (cf. Hebrews 12:29; 1 John 1:5). **The Bible says** – 1 John 4:16: “ ... God is love ... “ **Therefore – if we want to know him better** – if we want to be consumed by him – **then we respect his holiness** (the nature of his love) **with reverent fear and draw near to him with obedience. The Bible further says** – 1 John 4:16: “ ... God is love. Whoever lives in love [in his kind of holiness] lives in God and God in him.“

A human example would be that if – as a man – **you love a certain woman, you are** – in some cases – **willing to commit to the study of Meg Ryan movies, the pleasure of shopping for clothes, learning to talk about your feelings and lots more** – you respect all of these – **because you want to draw near to this person and become one with this person. It is the same with God. Only he is holy.** 1 John 2:3-6 – from the Bible: “We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands ... if anyone obeys his word, the love of God is truly made complete in him. This is how we know that we are in him ...“ Hebrews 12:14: “ ... without holiness no one will see the Lord” **but** – so Jesus said – Matthew 5:8: “ ... the pure in heart ... will see God.” **We want to see him** (nothing is more blessed) **and therefore we pursue a pure and holy heart. We are driven by love which in the end fears God without being afraid of him** (1 John 4:18). **We fear him and we love him.**

A perfect example of what I am talking about is Moses. He had seen the holy God in action – setting his people free from slavery in Egypt but also punishing those that opposed him with plagues (sending boils on people, even slaying the firstborn son of every family – horrific stuff). **Yet, Moses fell in love with God and couldn’t get enough of him. When he and the people of Israel came to Mount Sinai, God was there.**

I read from the Bible – Exodus 24:15-18: “When Moses went up on the mountain the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.” **The Lord God called Moses from within the cloud** – which contained his glory – **and Moses was allowed to enter in for forty days and forty nights. From below the mountain the glory cloud looked like a consuming fire. Wow. I recall a testimony where a congregation was worshipping in a building in Latvia and the neighbours saw flames of fire coming out of the church building so that they** – in fact – **called the fire brigade. Yet, it was the glory of God. Moses was in it for forty days and forty nights. He heard God speaking with him and received tablets of stone which were inscribed by the finger of God.**

Yet, he couldn’t get enough. Even at that very time he wanted more – Exodus 33:18: “ . Moses said, ‘Now show me your glory.’” And God was pleased with his desire for him. I read from the Bible – Exodus 33:19-34:7: “And the Lord said, ‘I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But,’ he said, ‘you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.’ Then the Lord said, ‘There is place near where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.’ ... And the Lord passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.’”

Moses loved God with a passion but even in his relationship with him God never lost his fearsome holiness. He was and is a God that is “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin”. **Yet, at the same time he does not leave the guilty unpunished and even someone like Moses was not allowed** – not able – **to see his face and live. This side of eternity none of us impure humans can survive the exposure of too much from God. We would die.** [For instance, some people get so filled with the joy of God or the love of God that they feel like dying. It is too much. Their human frame cannot contain so much of God in his purity.]

When Moses came out of this encounter with God, his own face ended up shining – glowing – **with the glory of God. It was so bright that he needed to cover himself with a veil before others** (Exodus 34:33) **because others were able to tolerate far less of God than he was. We want to fall in love with God** –

draw near to him – more and more – **but at all times we will respect the fearsome quality of his holiness.** [Isaiah 6:3: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”]

Let’s become more practical again. What do you think is the current state of your repentance? Up to now – how serious have you been about turning away from sin and toward God? Do you agree with what the Bible says – 1 Corinthians 6:9-11: “... Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” 1 Corinthians 6:18: “Flee from sexual immorality ...” **How pure are you when it comes to the sins of the flesh? Are you committing adultery or thinking about it? Are you in the grip of lust? Do you consume pornography? The Bible warns us: “Do not be deceived.” You must repent.**

Hear more from the Bible and make it practical for yourself. What do you need to let go? Galatians 5:19-21: “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.” You and I – **ask yourself: Do I get jealous of others? Do I have selfish ambition? Do I get drunk? Repent** – even this morning. **Love God and fear God.**

We are to be thorough in this because the standards of God are high and we are his people – Colossians 3:8-9: “. now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other ...”

Another good practice is to spend time on meditating on the ten commandments and what they mean. Martin Luther did this every day and I now read from his small instruction booklet which is called the Small Catechism [read two or three examples]:

The First Commandment: “You shall have no other gods.” *What does this mean?* We should fear, love and trust in God above all things. **The Second Commandment:** “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.” *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks. **The Third Commandment:** “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it. **The Fourth Commandment:** Honour your father and your mother. *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them. **The Fifth Commandment:** “You shall not murder.” *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need. **The Sixth Commandment:** “You shall not commit adultery.” *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other. **The Seventh Commandment:** “You shall not steal.” *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor's money or possessions, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve and protect his possessions and income. **The Eighth Commandment:** “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest possible way. **The Ninth Commandment:** “You shall not covet your neighbor's house.” *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not scheme to get our neighbor's inheritance or house, or get it in a way which only appears right, but help and be of service to him in keeping it. **The Tenth Commandment:** “You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not entice or force away our

neighbor's wife, workers, or animals, or turn them against him, but urge them to stay and do their duty.

Did you notice how Luther also begins explaining every commandment by saying: “What does this mean? We should fear and love God ... “ **Fear and love! Then the holy standard of God’s commandments – like a mirror – exposes our imperfections – when we do misuse God’s name – by swearing and tolerating movies that are full of swearing – or when we give false testimony – by harming another one’s reputation with our words of gossip.**

This is all rather practical and you cannot be a Christian if you are not willing to let go of your sin, that is: repent. Let God grant you repentance unto life and then follow up your repentance with practical fruit – as the Bible says – Luke 3:8: “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance ... “ **which means that you are to make reparations (cf. Luke 19:8) and start acting in love. Give back what you have stolen. Say sorry to those that you have damaged.**

Right – **this may sound like a lot of pressure right now – and therefore – in closing – I want to warn you about a common mistake. Salvation is by repentance and then – on the basis of your repentance – by the forgiveness of your sins – not by our own efforts of fixing what we have messed up in our lives. An evangelist complains: “ ... what is particularly saddening and even agonizing, is that many ministers and leading Christians give completely false instruction on how to overcome sin [on how to be a Christian]. The directions that are generally given on the subject, I am sorry to say, amount to this: 'Take your sins in detail, resolve to abstain from them, and fight against them, if need be with prayer and fasting, until you have overcome them. Set your will firmly against a relapse into sin, pray and struggle, and resolve that you will not fall – and persist in this until you form the habit of obedience and break all your sinful habits.' To be sure, it is generally added: 'In this conflict, you must not depend upon your own strength but pray for the help of God.' ... ” (Charles Finney: Power From God, New Kensington 1996, 119-120).**

This is wrong. We cannot get rid of sin in our lives by fighting sin just as we cannot get rid of the darkness in a room by trying to shovel out the darkness. We have to turn on the light. Repentance is turning on the light of Jesus in your life which overcomes sin with his power. Repentance is coming under his management and is not a self-improvement program where you struggle on your own to make yourself God-pleasing.

When you see it from this angle, repentance is a wonderful gift and is an exercise of joy because you can simply turn to Jesus – walk away from the bondage – let the old die – and then receive forgiveness and a new life which flows out from this forgiveness with the power of God. Do you understand what I am trying to say? Turn – repent – with your eyes fixed on Jesus – not the sin that you need to overcome. By faith – let him overcome the power of darkness in your life.

Now – are you ready? Do you want to repent? Peter preached to Cornelius, saying: “ ... Jesus Christ . is Lord of all ... everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” **Are you ready to turn and let Jesus Christ also be your Lord? It is a good turn – on offer from God – for you. Repent unto life. Amen.**

The Appointment 3 – Listen Satan

Peter preached to Cornelius and we want to pick up on another theme in his sermon which is shedding more light on the nature of our salvation. This is how Peter began his message – Acts 10:36-38: “You know the message ... peace [with God] through Jesus Christ ... You know what has happened ... how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”

When God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power – when God intensified his presence with Jesus through the Holy Spirit – what did Jesus then do? He confronted the devil. He was healing all who were under the power of the devil. This was his core business when he toured the country before he died. Peter did not even tell Cornelius that Jesus was speaking in front of thousands announcing the kingdom of God to them. When Jesus healed people – saved people – from the power of the devil, God’s rule had come. Nothing more needed to be said.

Only on one occasion this was challenged. The Bible records that – Matthew 12:22: “they brought to Jesus a demonized man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see.” Some people did not like the healing and the growing profile of Jesus and therefore – at that one time – they argued – Matthew 12:24: “... It is only by the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.” However, Jesus replied: “Nonsense. It should be obvious to anyone that Satan would have no power if he was divided against himself. No.” The truth is – Matthew 12:28: “If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” When Cornelius heard Peter preaching about Jesus “healing all who were under the power of the devil” (Acts 10:38), he didn’t need any further explanations but understood that this was about the kingdom of God and Jesus’ core business – as another verse from the Bible says – 1 John 3:8: “... The reason the Son of God [Jesus] appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.”

Jesus confronted Satan and this morning – for us – the confrontation with Satan continues because we ourselves want to be free from anything that comes from him. Carlos Annacondia, an evangelist in Argentina since 1981 – the key leader of what some say is the longest revival in church history – preaching to tens of thousands in city after city for decades – became known all across Argentina and the world for speaking these words in the presence of the congregation: “Listen to me, Satan.” He wrote a book with this title: “Listen to me, Satan.” This is what he would say and today we join him confronting our worst enemy: “Listen to me Satan; I’m against you! Spirit of witchcraft ... come out of these lives, out of the nations! Spirit of black magic and white magic, go away! Demons ... get out of here now! Touch these lives, God. Break the chains of satanic bondage. Devil, get out! Our God, move your hand of power. I rebuke all madness; spirit of the devil, go! I break all magic spells; I destroy all satanic spells! O God, your church stands up. We receive power, power from God. Breathe on us, Holy Spirit! Lord, we are your church, the winning and victorious church. Devil, you are defeated. Listen to me, Satan; take your hands off [these people and] the nations. Get out in the name of Jesus! And you, Satan, you are defeated for all eternity. Amen and amen” (Carlos Annacondia: Listen To Me Satan, Lake Mary: Charisma House 1998, p173-174).

This kind of confrontation may not yet be our normal church practice – we may even feel uncomfortable right now – but Carlos Annacondia would not rush this process. A magazine article said the following about him: “After observing the ministry of Carlos Annacondia for several years, I am prepared to offer a hypothesis: Annacondia may well be the most effective citywide interdenominational crusade evangelist of all time ... Annacondia has a great deal in common with traditional crusade evangelists. He preaches a simple gospel message, gives an invitation for people to come forward and receive Christ as their Lord and Savior ... If I am not mistaken, the major difference is Carlos Annacondia’s intentional, premeditated, high-energy approach to spiritual warfare. A permanent fixture of Annacondia’s crusades is what has to be one of the most sophisticated and massive deliverance ministries anywhere. Under the direction of Pablo Botari, a wise, mature and gifted servant of God, literally hundreds of individuals are delivered from demons each of the 30 to 50 consecutive nights of a crusade. The 150-foot deliverance tent, erected behind the speaker’s platform, is in operation from 8:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m. each night. Scores of teams whom Botari has trained do the actual hands-on ministry.”

I have never observed a crusade evangelist who is as publicly aggressive in confronting evil spirits as Annacondia. With a high-volume, high-energy, prolonged challenge he actually taunts the spirits until they

manifest in one way or another. To the uninitiated the scenario might appear to be total confusion. But to the skilled, experienced members of Annacondia's 31 crusade ministry teams, it is just another evening of power encounters in which the power of Jesus Christ over demonic forces is being displayed for all to see. Many miraculous healings occur, souls are saved, and so great is the spiritual power that unsuspecting pedestrians passing by the crusade meeting have been known to fall down under the power of the Holy Spirit (<http://www.strategicnetwork.org/index.php?loc=kb&view=v&id=4895&printerfriendly=Y&lang=>).

This morning we may try this on for ourselves. We stir ourselves up to be aggressive towards any tormenting demon among us and in this city. Therefore – this morning – more so than at other times – I also understand my preaching to be part of a prolonged attack against Satan and it has to be prolonged because – as Annacondia experienced himself: “We sometimes demand something for two or three days, and then we stop. We have to snatch out of the devil’s hands all that he took away from us. We need to be firm and consistent in our prayers” (Carlos Annacondia: Listen To Me Satan, Lake Mary: Charisma House 1998, p137).

Before we expand on the confrontation with Satan, let’s put this in context and continue learning from a man like Annacondia. We wouldn’t mind the same ministry. He writes: “Maybe you wonder what I do. I simply preach the good news as the Bible says in the Gospel of Mark: I speak the Word. Once the people have accepted Jesus and come forward to the platform as a public demonstration of their step of faith, I cast out the demons in the name of Jesus Christ, and they come out. I pray for the sick, and they get healed. I also pray, in every meeting, for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It’s very important to fulfill these four facets. Don’t neglect to do it, since each one is necessary: salvation, deliverance, healing and the baptism of the Holy Spirit” (Carlos Annacondia: Listen To Me Satan, Lake Mary: Charisma House 1998, p29). [*“I want to close this chapter with some words that God spoke to me: Love for the lost produces revival. When love ceases, revival does too. He who has passion for souls lives in an ongoing revival (Carlos Annacondia: Listen To Me Satan, Lake Mary: Charisma House 1998, p33).”*]ⁱ

Now – just in case that we think that this is too much from an evangelist in Argentina and not normal Christianity, let me assure you that the church from the beginning practiced the same confrontation. Every new believer was asked at his baptism: “Do you renounce the devil and all of his works?” **The church from the beginning understood that none of us is free from the influence and attacks of the devil. The Bible says the following about those that are not yet saved and under the lordship of Jesus Christ – Ephesians 2:1-3: “ ... you are [original: you were] dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you live [original: used to live] as you follow [original: when you followed] the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air [Satan], the spirit who is now at work in [all] those who are disobedient ... you are [original: you were] [like all of humanity] by nature objects of God’s wrath.” We belong to a fallen human race.**

When Jesus sent out Paul to do mission work, he sent him out with these words – Acts 26:17-18: “ ... turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are made holy by faith in me.” “ ... turn them from darkness to light ... from ... Satan to God ... “ **Jesus sent out Paul with the clear understanding that without him – everyone – without exception – will remain in darkness and under the power of Satan.**

Even Christians are bearing the cross of Satan persisting in pressuring them. We are no longer under the rule of Satan but Jesus himself was – Matthew 4:1: “ ... tempted by the devil” and – therefore knowing from experience the fierce battle of the will in temptations – **gave us the urgent advice – Matthew 26:41: “ ... pray so that you will not fall into temptation.” The Bible warns us further that – 1 Peter 5:8: “ ... your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” [Therefore, we are to “be self-controlled and alert”.] **Then, Satan is the ultimate reason for doing it tough in mission work. The Bible explains that – Ephesians 6:12: “ . our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the [demonic] authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”****

According to this last Bible verse many diverse authorities, dark powers and spiritual forces – of varying strength – populate the heavenly realms and their level of penetration into our lives also varies. What we all experience is some demonic activity on the outside of us. For instance – as mentioned before – temptation is common to us.ⁱⁱ Sometimes we are simply tempted because of the sinful desires within us and there is no concerted demonic attack on us. But at other times demons magnify the force of temptations – pressing us to sin – with the goal of having us break our relationship with God.

Then, some other outside influences include physical attacks or obstructions – such as when a demonized slave girl kept shouting after Paul in the city of Philippi (Acts 16:16-18) – and emotional

oppression. We have to be careful here because we do not always feel bad because of an unclean spirit – even Jesus wept when he came to Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) – but sometimes there is a demon or demons creating a heavy atmosphere around us – a phenomenon which even occurs among worshipping Christians.

However, demons are not content with mere outside influence. One pastor writes: “I describe demons as disembodied spirit beings that have an intense craving to occupy physical bodies” (Derek Prince: They Shall Expel Demons, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books 1988, p89) – our human bodies – and if they cannot remain within humans, they prefer animal bodies rather than nothing. For instance, at one time a legion of demons begged Jesus to let them go into a herd of pigs and they did with the result that the pigs drowned themselves in a mad rush down the bank of a lake (Luke 8:32-33).

Once inside a human – demons again exert varying levels of influence – from mild harrassment to complete possession. [The Bible uses the word “demonized” (daimonizomai) which means “subject to demonic influence”.] Even Christians – as much as they tolerate ongoing sin in their lives or suffer from generational curses or other unrepented sin, leave themselves open to demonic powers (cf. Luke 13:10-17). [It does not even need any gross sins to invite demons into oneself. One Christian had friends who were practicing “table rocking” (laying hands on a table and letting a demon move the table) and he was only peeking into the room through the key-hole of the door when a demon used his curiosity to attach himself to him. Demons wander about and may not be close to us when we practice sin but if they happen to be near us and then catch us in a sin, they have their opportunity to come inside us.]

Coming back to Carlos Annacondia – do you remember? – at every preaching crusade – he first leads people into accepting Jesus as their Lord – which makes them Christians – but then continues the work by setting them free from demons. Not every demon – automatically – leaves you once you become a Christian. We need to complete the joy of salvation by commanding demons to go, saying: “Listen to me, Satan ...”

One pastor was depressed for years until he read in the Bible about “the spirit of heaviness” in Isaiah 61:3, wondered whether this spirit could be the cause of his depression, asked Jesus to deliver him and then experienced the following – I quote from his book: “The response was immediate. Something like a huge vacuum cleaner came down over me and sucked away the gray mist that shrouded my head and shoulders. At the same time a pressure in the area of my chest was forcibly released, and I gave a little gasp” (Derek Prince: They Shall Expel Demons, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books 1988, p33).

There is no demon under every bush and there is no demon in every person but – on the other hand – they are not rare. Every single time Jesus and the disciples preached the kingdom of God, they would manifest in many and – according to the Bible – we are to experience the same – Luke 4:41: “... demons came out of many people, shouting ...” Mark 6:13: “The disciples [original: they] drove out many demons ...” Jesus said about us who would believe in him – Mark 16:17: “... In my name they will drive out demons ...” He commanded us – Matthew 10:6-8: “Go ... preach ... heal the sick ... drive out demons ...”

How then is it done? This morning I only want to give one answer – what is most important. Deliverance comes by faith – by faith – and this is precisely where we may have a problem. Be honest now. What do you expect will happen, when we say: “Listen to me, Satan ...” Do you expect anyone manifesting anything? Do you think that this church is growing weirder by the day? You may agree with the concept – the Bible teaching – but what do you expect? What do you “demand” – by faith – to happen?

When the disciples of Jesus were learning the ministry, they were already enjoying some success in driving out evil spirits (Matthew 10:1) and they knew the method of rebuking demons in Jesus’ name but – and this made Jesus so angry – listen to Jesus’ angry outburst – Matthew 17:17 – charging those around him: “O unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I stay with you ...” – the disciples were not consistent in getting results. They did what they usually did but with them the demon did not budge. Why? They asked Jesus later – Matthew 17:19: “... Why couldn’t we drive it out?” To which Jesus replied – Matthew 17:20: “... Because you have so little faith ...”

Faith is more than a general knowledge of how it works. Faith is more than giving it a go. According to the Bible – Hebrews 11:1: “... faith is being sure ... of the promised outcome. There is no room for “maybe” or “maybe not”.” “I am not sure – whatever God wants.” Jesus gave us specific instructions and he said – Matthew 21:21-22: “... if you have faith and do not doubt ... you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

Do we have the kind of faith which is free from doubt? My feeling is that if a person were to start foaming at the mouth or shouting with an alien voice – right now – in this worship service, we would be rather intimidated. Demons also intimidate those that have them because they become afraid of challenging their power. Not so long ago (2008) a young woman came to faith at the Station St Community Centre. She welcomed Jesus as her Lord. At the end of the night I went up to her again and rather nervously asked about any occult involvement or demonic oppression. I was not quite sure how she would take my questions but to my great surprise (I am still a pastor on P-plates) she immediately said: “I have two demons. One is on my back – to the right – and one is inside.” And then she started crying because she did not know how to become free of them. That night she was not ready for more prayer and facing them. So we simply bound them and gagged them in Jesus’ name until she had enough faith for the confrontation with the minions of Satan.

What about your faith? Are we ready for the ministry? The good news of salvation includes – must include – the deliverance from demons. Let’s become practical now. If faith is the key to victory over Satan, how can our faith be strengthened. The Bible says – Romans 10:17: “. faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” Faith comes from hearing the message – the good news of Jesus Christ –which means that faith comes from being immersed in the truth of salvation – listening to the right report on life.

According to the Bible there are – 1 Timothy 3:9: “... deep truths of the faith ...” which we have to learn and understand so that we grow in faith assurance. The Bible can even say that we – Ephesians 4:20: “... learn Christ ...” This is an important key to victory in our lives. The more we immerse ourselves in the truth of Christ, the more our faith power grows because – again this is from the Bible – 2 Corinthians 4:6: **It is “... God [that] ... makes [original: made] his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” **More on this** – John 15:26: “... the Spirit of truth goes out from the Father, he . testifies [original: will testify] about Jesus [original: me].” John 16:13: “. [from God the Father] the Spirit of truth comes to guide us [original: he will guide you] into all truth ...” **God makes something happen in us when we are under his word** – the message of Jesus Christ – the truth.**

Therefore, when you are confused – when you are down – open up your Bible, read a sermon, listen to some preaching, watch a Christian video, listen to the truth in worship songs. You may not feel like it but stir yourselves up. This is what I do. When I know that I need some faith refreshment, I am getting into the truth according to the Bible – allowing God – creating an opportunity – to make it come alive in my heart.

For instance, when I need a greater revelation – a greater faith knowing – that God loves me, then I listen to some preaching by Heidi Baker because she is so in love with our loving God. God makes it rub off on me. Then, when I am getting a little discouraged or fearful because the challenges get on top of me – I may have a crisis of faith doubting that God will manifest his power and glory in our worship service – then I listen to Bill Johnson and some other preachers because they have walked the walk and God uses their Bible trust and testimonies – and their faith courage – to build my faith. Faith comes from hearing the message – from being marinated in the truth. If you want to have more faith, spend more time in the truth.

The next practical step is – and this is what only a few people seem to know – the next practical step is to live the truth or lose it. What we do determines what we think – and this is a spiritual law. The human mind can design spacecrafts and nuclear powerplants but when it comes to working out God only those that are obedient to God and his truth, will be able to grow in the truth and retain the truth. Commit a sin and you confuse your mind.

Why is this so? According to the Bible – when you sin – and (above all) when you refuse to repent – you step outside the will and protection of God which gives Satan and his demons a legal right to mess with your mind. Satan wants nothing more than lie to you – deceive you – because if you believe his lies, you will lose the truth and your salvation. Jesus himself warned us that – John 8:44: “... the devil ... was a murderer from the beginning ... he is a liar and the father of lies.” **The devil murders by lying.**

[Not even the Christians that are closest to Jesus are safe from demonic deception. We have a great need to remain humble and dependent on God. One day Jesus asked his disciples who people thought that he was. Many thought that he might be one of the great prophets of the past – having coming back to life – Elijah or Jeremiah maybe or maybe the recently murdered John the Baptist. Then Jesus asked his disciples what they thought. Peter came up with a stunning answer – the right answer. He said – Matthew 16:16: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus blessed him for this answer, saying that this answer was given to him

by God himself and that he – favoured by God in this manner – would be given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever he – Peter – would bind on earth would be bound in heaven and whatever he would loose on earth, would be loosed in heaven. Wow. Peter was a great leader. Yet – only a few verses on – the same Bible chapter reveals how fragile our hold on the truth is. When Jesus explained that he would be a Saviour that would have to suffer and die, Peter objected, saying – Matthew 16:22: “Never Lord. This shall never happen to you!” Peter did not even have to think about his response – so sure was he of his opinion. Only the man that was so commended earlier is now rebuked by Jesus with some strength. Jesus said – Matthew 16:23: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of humans.” Jesus targeted Satan in Peter, saying: “Get behind me, Satan!” One moment Peter received the greatest revelation from God about his Son Jesus Christ – was spot on – but the next moment he was in the grip of Satan and a stumbling block to the purposes of God. Therefore – all of us, beware of pride.]

We let the Bible explain this to us further. Point 1: When we are obedient to God we are safe from Satan. 1 John 3:18: “We know that the true child of God does not sin, he is in the charge of God’s own Son [Jesus Christ] and the evil one must keep his distance” (JB Phillips translation). **If you do not sin, the devil must keep his distance.**

Point 2: Sin deceives the mind. Ephesians 2:2-4: “... the ruler of the kingdom of the air [Satan] ... is now at work in those who are disobedient ... [making them follow the] ... desires and thoughts [of our sinful nature] ...” 2 Timothy 3:2-4: “... the time will come when people will not up with sound teaching. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth ...” **Thus – here – sinful desires determine the teaching content of a great number of teachers.** 2 Corinthians 4:4: “The god of this age [Satan] has blinded the minds of unbelievers ...” **One more Bible reference which underscores the spiritual connection between disobedience and the delusion of the mind –** 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12: “... They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion [God allows Satan to blind their minds] so that they will believe a lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.” **Therefore – once again – if we do not love the truth and live the truth, then – over time – and it is over time because God is “slow to anger” and “abounding in love” (Exodus 34:6) – we risk the delusion of the mind – the believing of a lie – by God’s design and judgement.**

Point 3 – and this is the positive flip-side: **Obey God and your mind will be in order. You will grow in your faith –** in boldness and courage – the understanding of the truth. **Jesus promised –** John 7:17: “If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” [John 8:31-31: “... If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Colossians 2:2-5: “My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ ...” 1 John 4:7-8: “... let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”]

This is practical: Faith comes from hearing the truth and doing the truth. Therefore – right now – why not take Jesus by his word – check it out – choose to listen – choose to obey and find out about his truth. If you are aware of a particular sin in your life, determine to let go of this sin. Turn away from lying – from gossip, from laziness, from sexual immorality, from gluttony, from greed – to Jesus and let him grow you.

Another practical advice to help you in this comes from Jesus. He explained to his disciples that they could not drive out the demon in a sick boy because they had so little faith (Matthew 17:20) and therefore he counseled them to spend time in prayer and fasting (Mark 9:29). Therefore, if you want to be aggressive in gaining and growing in your faith, fast and pray – cut out food (all distractions) and spend time with God. Listen to him – with fasting obedience – and faith will come like a flood.

We continue in being practical. If we are to overcome Satan by faith in the truth, what are some of his lies which make us waver in our confidence. What about the lie that sin is more attractive than God? Satan may say to you: “All this talk about Jesus is fine but you cannot possibly give up clubbing.” “Stay with me and you won’t have to embarrass yourself in church.” “These days you can sleep with a girl on your first date. Don’t give that up.” “What can be better than the high of a drug?” **Satan is such a persuasive liar but Jesus exposed the truth, saying – John 8:34: “... everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” **Any sin – over****

time – enslaves you. For instance, even the government and newspapers are now talking about pornography addiction [or even mobile phone or sms addiction (seeking significance through communication rather than in God – making this gadget an idol)] – enslavement. **There is no joy in sin and there is no freedom.**

One of Satan’s biggest lies – if you want to become a Christian and be set free – **is that he tells you that you cannot be forgiven and that you cannot forgive anyone that has sinned against you. In my own experience there are some that pull back from Jesus because Jesus taught us to pray** – Matthew 5:9-13: “Our Father in heaven ... forgive us our sins as we also forgive those who have sinned against us ... “ **The devil tells you:** “No! You cannot forgive. The hurt is too great. You must have revenge.” **But God encourages you in the Bible** – Romans 12:19: “Do not take revenge ... leave room for God’s wrath, ... the Lord says, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay.’ ... ” **You can trust God and leave your case with him. He is just and he will do what is right. As for you** – Jesus spoke rather clear words – Luke 6:37: “ ... Forgive and you will be forgiven.” Matthew 6:14-15: “ . if you forgive people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive people their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

[Carlos Annacondia: Listen To Me Satan, Lake Mary: Charisma House 1998, p106: “At times when preaching about forgiveness, I hear people shout, ‘Lord, I forgive!’ In that very moment they receive the miracle they have been asking for and are filled with the Holy Spirit. Let me give you an example: If we want to fill a bottle with water, but we immerse it in water with a top on, hours can go by and the bottle will remain empty. You have to remove the top, and the bottle will get filled. The same happens in our lives; you need to forgive. Remove the top that doesn’t allow the Spirit of God to freely flow in your life.”]

This is the truth – maybe a tough truth but the truth – **and the devil will tell you that it cannot be done. You don’t want to forgive. You can’t – but you can – with God. One evangelist writes after years of experience:** “Every feeling of anger, hatred, or resentment is an open door to the devil. These feelings, once under the devil’s control, bring about suicides, depression, madness, and every kind of disease. Seventy percent of the people who come into our tent of deliverance are demonized [original: demonically possessed], but most of their spiritual problems are due to a lack of forgiveness” (Carlos Annacondia: Listen To Me Satan, Lake Mary: Charisma House 1998, p104). **This morning – make a decision to come to God with your hurt and lack of forgiveness.**

The other concrete point that the devil will argue with you is the victory of the cross. He will test your faith in what Jesus has done. When a minister was still lacking experience in these matters, the following happened. He writes: “ ... ‘In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,’ I commanded, ‘you spirit of hate, come out of this woman.’ An insolent voice, not in the least like Esther’s [the woman’s name], replied, ‘This is my house. I’ve lived here for 35 years. And I’m not coming out.’ ... The demon continued to defy me while I continued to say, ‘In the name of the Lord Jesus, you are coming out!’ It was a real conflict of wills. It seemed that I had to beat the demon down stage by stage. Each stage took quite a while. But the more I quoted Scripture and used the name of Jesus, the more I gained ascendancy over my enemy. Eventually the demon began to bargain with me. ‘If I come out,’ it said, ‘I’ll come back.’ I said, ‘No, you’ll come out and you’ll stay out.’ ... “ (Derek Prince: They Shall Expel Demons, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books 1988, p45-46). **In due time the demon of hate [– and other demons in her such as pride, jealousy, self-pity, ... –] had to come out of Esther.**

The key was that the more the pastor quoted Scripture, the more he was winning the battle. The truth of God spoken with faith – spoken with the boldness and authority of faith – **compels any demon to leave. By the way Jesus himself used the same technique. When the devil tempted him, he simply quoted the Bible** – the truth of God – **against him. When hunger seemed to get the better of him, Jesus rose up against the devil and quoted the verse that said** – Matthew 4:4: “ ... People do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” **This is practical and helpful. In sticky situations we also quote the Bible truth of God against the devil and then live on every one of God’s words** – by faith. **Victory will be ours.**

What then are some good Bible verses to remember before we challenge demons? I give you six references – 1 John 3:8: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” Colossians 1:13-14: “For God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Colossians 2:13-15: “ ... God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins ... And having disarmed the [demonic] powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” James 4:7: “Submit yourselves, then,

to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” 1 Corinthians 15:57: *“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* John 8:36: *“So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”*
Get the Bible – get the truth – into your system – let it seep into your souls – and you will have faith that no demon can resist. This is how it works and this is what honours God. Jesus will respond to the trust that you put into him.

My last point is also practical. Faith does not only think the truth but speaks the truth. According to the Bible – **the power of faith is released in our speaking** – when we speak words of authority. **This is how Jesus operated** – Matthew 8:16: “... many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word ...” **The spoken word drove the demons out. God created the world by speaking the world into existence** (Genesis 1) **and** – so now – as his children – **he also makes us wield power by speaking words** – Proverbs 18:21: “The tongue has the power of life and death.”

If you think about becoming a Christian, remember this. This is how God works. If there is a sin or power that keeps holding you down, open your mouth and speak. Renounce your sin aloud in front of a witness or witnesses – break the power of Satan who loves silent secrecy – hidden guilt. **Then declare aloud your allegiance to Jesus. There is power in that which the devil cannot touch. One last reference on this from the Bible** – Romans 10:9-10: “. if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” **The faith in your heart wields power on your lips.**

Therefore – are we ready now? Can we now confront Satan – by faith in Jesus? **I speak the words in agreement with you** (and I refuse to feel awkward): “Listen to me, Satan. We are standing against you. Demons of hate, anger, false religion, unforgiveness, ... get out. Demons of sexual immorality, perversion, lust and incest ... leave now. Let go of your grip in people’s lives. We send you to Jesus for judgement. We have victory over you in him – by the power of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross – by the power of his blood which he shed for us on the cross. He made a spectacle of you. You lost because we have forgiveness of all of our sins in his name. You must leave now in Jesus’ name. Listen to me, Satan. You rob, steal and destroy but today we command you to flee from us. Demons of discouragement, tiredness, fear, ... out of here now in the name of Jesus. My Lord is stronger than you. Go.”

I say it again: “Listen to me, Satan. You are defeated for all eternity.” **Amen and amen.**

Let’s do this step by step with faith perseverance:

As we now pray, I encourage you to meet four conditions (Derek Prince: They Shall Expel Demons, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books 1998, p64):

1. Be sure you have repented – that is, turned away from every form of sin.
2. Look only to Jesus; He alone is the Deliverer.
3. Base your appeal solely on what Jesus did for you through His death on the cross, not on any “good works” of your own.
4. Be sure that, by an act of your will, you have forgiven every person who ever harmed or wronged you.

Take hold of the promises:

1. Joel 2:32: “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”
2. Mark 16:17: “In my name you shall expel demons.” => In the name of Jesus you have authority to expel them from yourselves.

Derek Prince: *They Shall Expel Demons*, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books 1998, 216:

- 1 *Personally affirm your faith in Christ:*
“Lord Jesus Christ, I believe You are the Son of God and the only way to God – that you died on the cross for my sins and rose again so that I might be forgiven and receive eternal life.”
- 2 *Humble yourself:*
“I renounce all pride and religious self-righteousness and any dignity that does not come from You. I have no claim on Your mercy except that You died in my place.”
- 3 *Confess any known sin:*
“I confess all my sins before You and hold nothing back. Especially I confess ... “
- 4 *Repent of all sins:*
“I repent of all my sins. I turn away from them and I turn to You, Lord, for mercy and forgiveness.”
- 5 *Forgive all other people:*
“By a decision of my will, I freely forgive all who have ever harmed or wronged me. I lay down all bitterness, all resentment and all hatred. Specifically, I forgive ... “
- 6 *Break with the occult and all false religion:*
“I sever all contact I have ever had with the occult or with all false religion – particularly ... “
“I commit myself to get rid of all objects associated with the occult or false religion.”
- 7 *Prepare to be released from every curse over your life:*
“Lord Jesus, I thank You that on the cross You were made a curse, that I might be redeemed from every curse and inherit God’s blessing. On that basis I ask You to release me and set me free to receive the deliverance I need.”
- 8 *Take your stand with God:*
“I take my stand with You, Lord, against all Satan’s demons. I submit to You, Lord, and I resist the devil. Amen.”
- 9 *Expel:*
“Now I speak to any demons that have control over me. [Speak directly to them.] I command you to go from me now. In the name of Jesus, I expel you!”

Each time you experience a release, praise and thank God for it. Giving thanks and praise is the simplest and purest expression of faith. It also creates an atmosphere that demons find intolerable.

When you feel your deliverance is complete, or that you have come as far as you can at this time, be sure to kneel down and *make Jesus Lord of every area of your life*. Remember the warning of Jesus that if a demon comes back and finds the house empty, he will return and bring others with him ...

If you feel your deliverance is not complete, wait until your strength returns or you feel prompted by the Holy Spirit. Then continue with the process of getting the demons out ...

Finally, here is a reminder that applies to every Christian: *You never need to be ashamed of having been delivered from demons*. In the gospel record there was one person to whom God granted a unique and glorious honor: to be the first human witness of the resurrection of Jesus. The incident is recorded in Mark 16:9: “Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.”

Think of it! Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, who was identified as the one “out of whom He had cast seven demons.” ...

The Appointment 4 – The Double-Action

The Cornelius story provides still another key to our life with God. Listen again to the opening Bible verses – Acts 10:1-8: “At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius ... He was a devout man who feared God, as did everyone in his home. He gave many gifts to the poor among the people and always prayed to God. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, ‘Cornelius!’ Cornelius stared at him in fear. ‘What is it, Lord?’ he asked. The angel answered, ‘Your prayers and gifts to the poor have ascended as a memorial before God ... ’”

This is interesting. According to the angel – a monument – a memorial (*not unlike the Anzac memorials that we know*) with the name of Cornelius on it – **ascended before God in heaven (honour came to Cornelius in heaven) **and God** – for that reason – in response – **sent an angel to him on a mission of blessing. God was pleased with Cornelius and found it impossible to ignore him. Why? As Christians – and as those who are thinking about becoming Christians – we want to know because we also want God to be pleased with us. How are we to live? What concrete actions are at the heart of our relationship with God? The answer is in the Bible verses. I repeat them – Acts 10:1-8: “ ... Cornelius ... was a devout man who feared God ... He gave many gifts to the poor among the people and always prayed to God ... The angel said to him, ‘Your prayers and gifts to the poor have ascended as a memorial before God ... ’”****

We are left in no doubt. God took note of two things – the prayers of Cornelius and the money which he gave to the poor. God desires this kind of double-action in every Christian. At one time Jesus was asked by a Bible teacher – Mark 12:28: “ ... Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” Jesus answered by saying – Mark 12:30-31: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” **This was the theory – love God and love your neighbour – which Cornelius then lived out in practice. He loved God by praying to him always and he loved his neighbours by giving them much money.**

We could now go down the track and expand on what it means to pray always. For instance, another angel proclaimed in the last book of the Bible – Revelations 14:7: “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgement has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.” **Worship him for who he is and what he has done. In the same vein another verse says – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”**

When we pray, we give praise to God and – at the same time – we also exercise an immense privilege. There are promises attached to prayer. I give you two more Bible references – Hebrews 4:16: “Let us then [because we have peace with God through Jesus Christ] approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Philippians 4:4-7: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice ... Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” **God promises to answer prayer.**

We could now go down this track and say much – much – more about prayer but – for the purpose of this morning’s message – my guess is that we do not struggle as much with prayer as we struggle with the second part of the Christian double-action, that is: the giving away of money to the poor – our money. This is not a comfortable subject and some of us may even think that talking about dollars and cents in church is not spiritual enough (hard cash is of the world – not church) but – the truth is that – Jesus himself always talked about money. He preached more than twice as much on giving than on prayer and the angel explained to Cornelius that his prayers and money giving together ascended as a memorial to God. Both melded into one before God – just as the two commandments of loving God and loving others seem to have melded into one. Together they are the most important commandment.

Jesus even explained that – at their deepest level – the commandments of love do become the one commandment of loving God. He said – Matthew 25:40: “ ... Whatever you do [original: did] for one of the least [for those that are hungry or thirsty, naked or sick or in prison] ... , you do [original: did] for me.”

However – before we stress too much about where this may go – the good news is that God knows the value of money and does not object to us having some. Whatever we give, will return to us with interest. According to the Bible it is like a farmer sowing seeds in spring time and reaping a manifold

return at harvest time. Seeds multiply. Money multiplies in God. Cornelius gave much money to the poor but then it became a memorial ascending to God and therefore God sent an angel to him with much more favour in return. The Bible again and again confirms this principle: Give and you will receive – empty your pockes and they will be filled again – with more than enough from God.

The Bible abounds in references to this. For instance, Luke 6:38: “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” Jesus said – Luke 18:29: “ ... No one who has left home or [family] ... for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come, eternal life.” Luke 12:29-34: “ . do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it .. your Father [in heaven] knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well ... Sell your possessions and give to the poor ... ” 2 Corinthians 9:8: “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” Malachi 3:8-12: “ ... ‘Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, *How do we rob you?* In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse – the whole nation of you – because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,’ says the Lord Almighty.”

According to the Bible and this last reference – **God is so committed to making our money multiply that he invites you to test him in this.** “Give,” he says – maybe for the first time: “Try me in this and see whether I will not in return throw open the floodgates of heaven for you and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”

This is the good news. We are serving a rich God whom we can trust with our giving. Yet – and I say this before you open your wallet and start giving – when we delve deeper into the Bible teaching – the whole subject matter of money does become more difficult – even scary – after all. Even the last Bible reference was not only positive. God accused his people of robbing him because they were not paying the tenth of their income – plus offerings – to him for the upkeep of temple worship. Therefore, he announced to them that they were under a curse. Strong words! Alarming words – because: What do they mean for us? Does a Christian rob God when he does not give the whole tithe to God – that is: ten percent of his income – and is he therefore – at some stage – under a curse?

But why – with the promise of open floodgates – would we hold back money from God? Why did his people in the past? God knew why and he exposed their reasoning – saying to them – Malachi 3:14: “You have said, ‘It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements ... ’” **The people in the past lost faith in God** – no longer believed that serving him would bring anything in return. **You need faith to start tithing.**

Another problem was greed. Giving money away goes against the grain of most of us – no matter what is promised in return. Only – human greed cancels out all of God’s promises. The Bible teaches – James 3:3: “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” **Wrong motives – greed – frustrate prayer. God will not release anything in response to that.**

Cornelius did not give his money to the poor for selfish reasons but as an act of worship to God. He was devout and God-fearing and Peter – therefore – preached about him in this manner – Acts 10:34-35: “ ... God ... accepts people ... who fear him and practice righteousness ... ” **Therefore, any church sales-pitch which appeals to your greed – like: “Give to become rich. If you want a better car, put more in the offering plate ... ” – is bound to end in tears. Greed is not God-fearing and is not righteousness.**

Furthermore, God does promise to open up the floodgates of heaven for us but the blessings are not always in the form of prosperity and not always for ourselves. Cornelius did not receive a good investment tip from the angel – as much as that may be needed today in the midst of a global financial crisis. Cornelius and his family and his friends received far more than money. God granted them salvation, repentance unto life and the baptism with the Holy Spirit – Acts 10:44-46 – the Bible says: “ ... the Spirit came on all who heard the message ... they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.” **God set up Cornelius for the future – eternity – which is far more important than dying with the most toys on earth.**

[Consider also how Cornelius' charity ended up leaving a mighty inheritance for his children who also received salvation and Spirit baptism because of him.]

We need to be careful here. The Bible teaches us words of wisdom – 1 Timothy 6:6-10: “. godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil ...”

I give you one example which may illustrate how this can work out in practice. A pastor from the persecuted church in China writes about his years in prison – I quote from his book: “I noticed that my son wore the same clothes every time he visited me – the same clothes he'd owned at the time I was arrested. Even though he was growing much bigger, he had to keep wearing the same shirt and trousers. His shoes had large holes in them. Delin [my wife], Isaac [my son] and Yilin [my daughter] were extremely thin. I realized they had no money at all and were struggling to survive” (Brother Yun: The Heavenly Man, Grand Rapids: Monarch Books 2002, p210).

This family gave everything and were suffering in persecution. Where then were the provisions of God? Abundance did not come to them at that time but God proved faithful. He can be trusted to supply what is needed. The pastor's wife wrote this about the years of hardship: “God helped us greatly while my husband was in prison. There are two special miracles that I'd like to share with you from this time. With only Yun's mother and me left to run the farm, things were desperate! We had no clue what we were doing. We decided to plant sweet potatoes, but didn't know how to do it. I found out later that we should have planted the roots about two feet apart. I had planted them just a few inches apart. All summer long our neighbours who heard about my foolishness mocked us and made fun of us! The news spread rapidly and I was the butt of many jokes. Then in autumn, all our neighbours started cursing because they had very poor yields from their harvest. Their sweet potatoes were only the size of tennis balls. When we pulled up our sweet potatoes, we found they were almost the size of basketballs! It was a great miracle and everyone knew God had taken care of us.

Our neighbours respected us more from that moment on and they didn't view my husband as a cursed criminal any more ... The second miracle took place when Isaac was three. We had to exchange a portion of whatever crops we produced because we owned no animals or fertiliser. Therefore it was imperative we had a good harvest, or we would not be able to buy food to eat or the other items we needed to survive.

This time I didn't know how to plant wheat seeds. I placed them so close together that they carpeted the soil! Just a week before the wheat harvest, a severe hailstorm struck. Ice the size of tennis balls fell from the sky. I rushed outside when the hail started and could already see that some of our neighbours' wheat fields had been completely flattened by the storm. Yun's mother and I fell to our knees and cried out, 'God, have mercy on us!' A great miracle happened. Our field was the only one protected by the Lord. All our wheat was standing upright, untouched by the hail. Everyone else's fields in the whole area had been obliterated. People came out of their homes after the storm subsided and saw how the Lord Jesus Christ had protected us. It was another powerful testimony to them. While we enjoyed thick, healthy wheat that year, our neighbours had no harvest and were forced to use what was left of their crops as food for their animals. Looking back, despite the hard times, the Lord was faithful to us” (Brother Yun: The Heavenly Man, Grand Rapids: Monarch Books 2002, p164-165).

God was faithful to his promises – in this case, not granting prosperity but the miracle of survival during the family's worst years. **How are you hearing this? Is this acceptable to you?**

We continue with going deeper. Jesus attacked the rich with a vengeance and much of what he said makes us nervous – even today. **I give you a further sample of his sayings** – Luke 6:24: “. woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.” Luke 16:13: “You cannot serve both God and Money.” Luke 18:25: “. it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” Luke 12:15: “. ... Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Jesus pushed this line to the utmost limits of anyone's comfort zone and in the end demanded that we give up everything for him, saying – Luke 14: “. any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.” Luke 12:33: “Sell your possession and give to the poor.” **This then became practical and real among the first Christian about whom the Bible records** – Acts 2:44-45: “All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods [when required], they gave to

anyone as he had need.” Acts 4:32-35: “ ... No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had ... There were no needy person among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and ... it was distributed to anyone as he had need.”

Wow! This is confronting and – by now – somewhat confusing. What is on God’s mind? On the one hand, he teaches the principle – Luke 6:38: “Give, and it will be given to you ... ” He promises to open floodgates of rich harvests in return to our giving but, on the other hand, he asks us to let go of all of our possessions. What is going on here?

The answer is that God is absolutely committed to breaking the stronghold of money in our lives. God is a jealous God and he knows that – many a time – we trust in money more than we trust in him. Money buys insurance – buys power – buys status – buys pleasure – buys sex appeal – buys independence. We love money and we fear losing money. But God – to our great discomfort – is absolutely committed to breaking what money has become in our lives – before he again trusts us with lots of it.

Rees Howells raised millions of pounds (in today’s currency) for the kingdom of God during World War II but in his early days God taught him to depend on him alone for everything. He was to serve God (in preaching and prayer) but not earn a wage and not ask anyone for donations.

[Abbreviate and retell this section from Norman Grubb: Rees Howells Intercessor, Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press 1952, 159-160:] “On one occasion he only had a few days in which to get 20 pounds ... There was another student, a Cambridge graduate, who had been saying openly that he had never prayed a prayer that had brought a direct, definite answer. So Mr Howells invited him to join in this prayer for 20 pounds. He had never heard of praying for money like that and expecting it to come. They were to pray for two hours one afternoon, each in his own room. The young man was exhausted at the end of it! He had never known time go so slowly; he said the two hours were like two months! Mr Howells did not pray through in the afternoon, so suggested that they should go back for a further two hours in the evening. ‘What!’ exclaimed his friend, ‘four months’ hard labour for 20 pounds!’ However, he agreed to try again if Mr Howells thought he could be of any help. Before the end of this second period of prayer, Mr Howells went to his room, and said, ‘You don’t need to pray any more, I am through.’ ‘Have you got the money?’ he said. ‘No, but I have got the faith, and the money will come.’ ... Two days later Mr Howells received two 10 pound notes ... he went to his friend’s room and held them up for him to see ... “

Twenty pounds may not sound like much money but God – step by step – taught Rees Howells to live by faith in him and not faith in what he could provide for himself. He was to give up everything – and all control – for the floodgates of heaven to open for him – always. [By the way, did you notice the principle by which Rees Howells prayed until he had the faith for receiving the money. When the faith came – the boldness and certainty of faith – he knew that God would give according to his faith.]

This is not an easy walk. Another example from his life. [Abbreviate and retell this section from Norman Grubb: Rees Howells Intercessor, Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press 1952, 162-164:] “ ... [Rees Howells and his wife were preparing to leave as missionaries to Africa] There is always a tendency to keep money, so as to get out of God’s testings,’ said Mr Howells, ‘and we tried our best to do it this time! Anyway, we had to spend the money, and all the people of the place thought we were well supplied. So we were, up to that week, and we thought money would be sure to come the day before we leave for London; but the last post came and no money, and our train was leaving before the post next morning. We thought it would be very hard to say good-bye to my uncle and aunt and little Samuel, but the burden for the train money made the parting a little easier! ... Next morning, it was not so hard to part with our parents, because we had to walk to the station without the money! We felt sure that it would come on the station platform, but no, the time came for the train to leave. What were we to do? There was only one thing possible. We still had ten shillings, and we must go as far as we could with it, then our extremity would be God’s opportunity. We had to change trains at Llanelly station, about twenty miles from our home, and wait there for a couple of hours, so without letting anyone know, we only booked as far as that. There were many people at our home station wishing us all the good things, but what we needed was money to go to London! Many also came as far as Llanelly, singing all the way. The thought that came to me was, ‘I’d sing better if I had the money!’

... now the time for the train had come. The Spirit then spoke to me and said: ‘If you had money what would you do?’ I said: ‘Take my place in the queue at the booking office.’ ‘Well, are you not preaching that My promises are equal to current coin? You had better take your place in the queue.’ So there was nothing I could do except obey. There were about a dozen people before me. There they were passing by the booking office one

by one. The devil kept on telling me, ‘Now you have only a few people in front of you, and when your turn comes, you will have to walk through. You have preached much about Moses with the Red Sea in front and the Egyptians behind; but now you are the one who is shut in.’ ‘Yes, shut in,’ I answered, ‘but, like Moses, I’ll be gloriously led out!’ When there were only two people before me, a man stepped out of the crowd and said, ‘I’m sorry I can’t wait any longer, but I must open my shop.’ He said good-bye and put thirty shillings in my hand! It was most glorious, and only a foretaste of what the Lord would do in Africa, if we would obey. After I had the tickets, the people who came with us to the train began to give gifts to us, but the Lord had held them back until we had been tested. We were singing all the way to London.”

This seems to be a nerve-wrecking way to live. In the end they were singing all the way to London because God – once again – was faithful but do we want to live in the same way – always on the edge of depending on God for everything? Maybe this message should have stuck with the topic of prayer. Cornelius not only gave money but also prayed and – maybe – we should have tried to be like him in that first – not get into these money matters.

Only – as we have said in the beginning – both are worship and both are spiritual (cf. Romans 12:1) and – even with God – actions speak louder than words. We cannot pray and propose to love him but then not practice mercy and pay the cost of serving him. Then – as a church – we need people who are confident that handling money – seeing it multiply by faith – is their main spiritual work. The Bible does talk about the grace gift of “contributing to the needs of others” (Romans 12:8; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:28) and we need people who grow in this gift of financing kingdom work.

Are we ready now to make this very concrete and practical? How much are you to give? A good starting point is what God told his people from the beginning. I read from the Bible – Leviticus 27:30: “A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.” The meaning of the word “tithe” is “a tenth part”. Ten percent was to be given back to God and as a starting point we may do the same. Freewill offerings are on top of that but the ten percent were to be returned to God first – before considering all of our other needs – as the Bible teaches – Proverbs 3:9: “Honour the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops.”

How does the figure of ten percent strike you? Is it too high? Is your income too low to meet this standard? One day Jesus was watching what people put into the offering box and – I read from the Bible – Luke 21:1-4: “... Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ‘I tell you the truth,’ he said, ‘this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

Jesus praised the poor widow for giving to God everything that she had. It wasn’t foolish of her but an act of great sacrifice and worship. Jesus was pleased with her. We may think that two very small copper coins – or (today) two ten cent pieces – are not even worth putting into the offering bag. What can anyone buy for that? Yet, God takes an entirely different view. He views the small amounts as a testing ground for us. He says in the Bible – Luke 16:10: “Whoever can be trusted with very little can be trusted with much ...” (cf. Matthew 25:23). **If we can be trusted to be faithful with a small income, he will be able to trust us with much more.**

Are we still nervous? Hear God assuring us again – Malachi 3:8-12: “... Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse ... Test me in this,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it ...”

Tithing is a good starting point for giving back to God. However, then we can go further in our faith.ⁱⁱⁱ We are a rich people and therefore Jesus’ words apply to us – Luke 12:48: “... From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.” 1 John 3:17-18: “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”

What do you think? With faith in God how far can we go? What difference can we make in this city and nation? I close with a testimony from Heidi Baker. She writes (April 11, 2007): “Years ago, I had a vision of Jesus surrounded by a multitude of children. Jesus looked at me with his intense, burning eyes of love, and I was completely undone. He told me to feed the children, and I began to cry out loud, ‘No! There are too many!’ He asked me to look into his eyes, and he said, ‘I died that there would always be enough.’ Then he reached down and broke a piece of flesh out of his right side. His eyes were so magnificently beautiful, yet his

body so bruised and broken. He handed me a piece of his flesh, and as I took it and stretched my hand out to the first child, it became fresh bread! I gave the bread to the children and they all ate.

Then he put a simple poor man's cup next to his side and filled it with blood and water. He told me it was a cup of 'suffering and joy,' and asked me if I would drink it. I drank it and then started to give it to the children. It became drink for them. Again he said, 'I died that there would always be enough.' Since that day, I have taken in every orphan child he has put in front of me, and have asked my co-workers to do the same.

For the next ten years, I learned a lot about provision for the poor. With delight, I have watched God place bread in our hands for the children to eat. By his grace, every day there is somehow always enough food. Since the vision, we have gone from caring for 320 children to over 6,000. My heart is so full of praise and gratitude to God for how he has blessed us with all these beautiful children. I have stood in awe as God has grown us from a few churches to over six thousand in ten years time.

Jesus has given us fresh bread from heaven. We live to be in his glorious presence. He has poured out his love to us without measure. He has called us to bring the lost children home. I love him more than life! Every breath is for Him."

First Heidi cried out: "No! No! There are too many orphan children. I cannot take care of them!" **But then she looked into Jesus' eyes and heard him say to her:** "I died that there would always be enough." **From that day Heidi never said "no" to a single needy child. She kept giving what she had and trusted Jesus that somehow there would always be enough.** *[I am sure that a memorial in her name has also ascended to God in heaven.]*

What about us now? How far can we go with the Christian double-action of praying and giving? Maybe we have to test this out in stages. We begin with tithing and then slowly get to a place where we also never say "no" to a single needy person among us. Jesus said: "I died that there would always be enough." **Therefore – pray and give – according to you faith – and there will always be enough. Amen.**

The Appointment 5 – God’s Absolute Best

Peter had not even finished his preaching, when the ultimate happened. I read from the Bible – Acts 10:44-46: “While Peter was still speaking these words [preaching Jesus Christ], the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The other Christians [original: circumcised believers] who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on them [original: Gentiles]. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.”

This had been on God’s mind from the beginning. Remember that God had sent an angel to Cornelius with the following message – Acts 10:4-6: “ ... Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter ... ” Then – after further arrangements by God – **Cornelius finally caught up with Peter and heard these words from him – Acts 10:36: “ ... the message [is] ... good news of peace [with God] through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all.”** Peter continued with some more preaching about Jesus – how everyone who believed in him would receive forgiveness through his name – **but then came the practical outcome – what God had intended from the beginning – the absolute best what anyone can have from God. I read it again from the Bible – Acts 10:44-46: “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The other Christians [original: circumcised believers] who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on them [original: Gentiles]. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.”**

God was fast-tracking Cornelius. Not only did he listen and then believe for his salvation. He also immediately received the promised gift which is promised to everyone who puts his faith in Jesus. If you are sitting here in church this morning and you do not yet know what this gift is about – if you do not yet know what happened to Cornelius – keep listening to this sermon (which is preaching the same Jesus Christ that was preached to Cornelius) – learn in greater detail what is also promised to you – and then also receive the same gift of the Holy Spirit – now – today.

I say it again: God cut Peter short. He could not even complete all that he wanted to preach because God was almost impatient (so it seems) to shower grace upon grace unto Cornelius. The Bible teaches us that – John 3:16: “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” And therefore, **the Bible encourages us with this question – Romans 8:32: “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”**

If you are sitting here in church this morning and you are not quite sure about God and what you can expect from him, listen to this: God is even wanting to cut this sermon short (he doesn’t care how much preparation time I put into this) because he desires to bless you with the same gift that came upon Cornelius. This is the truth. God did not spare his Son – also for you – and, along with his Son, he wants to give you all things. Meditate on this for a moment: “all things” – “all things”. Romans 8:32: “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

[And by the way – God knows that we do not deserve anything good (none of us has lived up to his perfect standard) but he delights in giving us what we do not deserve – by grace, that is: undeserved compassion and love and mercy. Ephesians 2:4-10: “But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved ... through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one may boast ... ”]

Let’s unpack in more detail what precisely happened to Cornelius. Whatever it was, it was something that others could observe because Peter could see and hear that something had happened to his congregation. The evidence was – according to the Bible – Acts 10:46 – that “ . they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.” Something from God had been powerful enough to break the protocol of politeness (letting a guest-speaker finish his sermon) and broke out in joyful speech – speaking in tongues (prayer words given by the Holy Spirit that the mind does not understand) and praise.

Witnessing this – **Peter and the other Christians said – Acts 10:47: “ ... They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.”** And later Peter reported to his home-church – Acts 11:15: “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning.” Peter drew a reference to his own experience which was the experience of the very first outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples

of Jesus. I read the account from the Bible – Acts 2:1-4: “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”

This is what happened in the beginning. Now – the experiences of Cornelius and Peter were not identical. With Cornelius there was no sound like the blowing of a violent wind or tongues of fire but both times there was speech – praise (the joyful speaking out of God’s truth) – speaking in tongues – even though only in the case of Peter and the first Christians the speaking in tongues had come with the miracle of being understood by people from other nations. Foreign nationals had asked in amazement – Acts 2:6-11: “ ... how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes ... residents of Mesopotamia ... Egypt and ... Libya ... visitors from Rome ... and Arabs – we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”

When the Holy Spirit is poured out on people, the experiences vary but Peter and the other Christians were not confused. Cornelius and those with him had received the same gift. Back home – reporting to his church – Peter added another comment which may be helpful for us today. He declared – Acts 11:16: “Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” **What John did with water, Jesus would do with the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself had said that he would “baptize” people in the Holy Spirit which means that he would “plunge people into” – “drench them with” – “submerge them in” – the Spirit of God. As people went completely under water in the baptism of John, so people would be completely under (covered by) the Spirit of God in the baptism of Jesus. Therefore – even though the Bible nowhere gives a precise definition of the event – the experience of the Spirit baptism is one of fullness and richness – saturation (which means that you know when it happens).**

Hear a few more Bible references on this. John the Baptist – the forerunner of Jesus – had already announced him with the words – Luke 3:16: “ ... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit ... “ **Then Jesus himself – as Peter would remember later – also spelled it out clearly to the first Christians – Acts 1:4-5:** “ ... you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” **Acts 1:8:** “ . you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and [then] you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and ... to the ends of the earth.” **When people were wondering about the first actual Spirit baptism on the day of Pentecost, a sermon explained the event and the practical outcome for everyone – Acts 2:17-39:** “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people ... People, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs ... and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him ... God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear ... be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ ... Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and ... for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

The Father raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus then received from him the promised Holy Spirit and poured out the person of the Holy Spirit on the first Christians and other Christians – including us today. [You can see here that we have one God who comes to us in the form of three persons – who is three persons.] Further experiences of this are recorded in Acts 13:52: “And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Spirit.” **Acts 19:6:** “When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.” Cf. Acts 8:15-17; 9:17.

One evangelist shared that there are some who receive a more sedate baptism of the Holy Spirit – and that is okay – there is nothing deficient about that – but his was explosive. He writes: “The night I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit marked my ministry and me forever. It was during a meeting with evangelist Manuel Ruiz. We started to pray and worship God. In a few minutes most of the people in the place were speaking in new tongues. Maria, my wife, looked like an angel. She was singing and speaking in tongues with such fluency. I suddenly realized that everybody was receiving the baptism except me. From the depth of my soul I wanted to receive the baptism they were receiving. I started to cry out to God with all my heart, ‘Lord, baptize me or I will die!’ I had only known him for a week, and I was already experiencing incredible

things. As I was crying out to God with all that was in me, asking for his baptism, lightning fell over me from heaven. It was God's power. It threw me to the ground, and I started to speak in new tongues ... ” (Carlos Annacondia: Listen To Me Satan, Lake Mary: Charisma House 2008, p111-112).

Did you notice his passion – his desperation – when everybody seemed to receive except him? He cried out: “Lord, baptize me or I will die!” Do the same. This morning ask the Lord to baptize you.

Then, the same evangelist talked about his children: “Some years ago in 1981 when my children told me that they wanted to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, I said, ‘All right, if you want God to baptize you, go to your room and kneel down to pray.’ So they did. They went to their room and started to ask God for his baptism. Even our little baby girl was there, in her nanny’s arms. All of a sudden I heard a clamor coming from their room. I told my wife, Maria, ‘Let’s go to see the children. God is visiting them.’ When we came into the room, the nanny was shaking. She was a new believer, but she was speaking in tongues and prophesying. My eldest daughter was on the floor prophesying. The rest of the children were speaking in tongues ... ” (Carlos Annacondia: Listen To Me Satan, Lake Mary: Charisma House 2008, p115-116).

The Bible makes it very clear that after the initial baptism with the Holy Spirit, we need refillings – and again refillings – and throughout our lives experience ongoing top-ups of Jesus pouring out the Spirit on us. So this is what one pastor experienced who needed a fresh touch of God in his life. He writes: “When I picked up the phone ... John Arnott was on the other end. I could feel the intensity in his voice ‘come and check this out’ ... he began to describe how the Holy Spirit was touching people ... My interest was stirred, and I bought a one-way plane ticket to [his place] ... As I was packing the Lord spoke to me and said, ‘If you go to analyze, you’ll end up criticizing, and I will lift my hand off of you. But if you go as a child to partake, I will pour out my anointing on you, again, and again, and again!’ ... I arrived ... and I felt like I had walked into a bonfire ... I did the typical . pastor thing; I stood off to the side to observe what was going on. As Randy prayed ... As he interceded for me, I felt this overwhelming sense of the peace and power of God come over me, and then it felt like someone turned out the lights. I don’t know how long I was out, but I had this incredible sense of the immanent presence of the Holy Spirit resting on me. Throughout the evening every time I would try to get up, someone would pray, ‘Touch him again, Lord. More, Lord. More, Lord!’ And out I would go again, each time resting deeply in the peace and presence of the Lord ... This went on for days. I felt and acted very intoxicated. I couldn’t talk, except in short cryptic phrases ... But as time passed I felt more and more cleansed and calm deep down on the inside. I felt the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit all the time, and continued to soak in a state of blissful abandonment ... ” (Guy Chevreau: Catch The Fire, Canada: Harper Perennial 1994, p149-151).

When this pastor gave up standing off to the side – gave up any critical analysis – and entered in like a child, he received – peace, becoming cleansed and calm, soaking in the presence of God.

His wife also later came and joined him. She writes: “I cancelled appointments, and left ... On the way up all I could pray in my spirit was ‘Whatever you want Lord ... whatever you want.’ I have to admit I was both scared and anxious ... what would happen to me? ... We got Ron [my husband] up and on a chair, and as worship began, he nudged me and pointed his finger in my face and said (as best as he could) ‘C...a...l...l...9...l...l’ [in Australia: 000]. There was a look of fear and distress on his face and it scared me. My first thought was he really had flipped out. As worship continued, Ron caught the eye of some other and said the same thing. It was so bizarre and so out of character ... After a couple of days of Ron continuing to call for 911, someone finally put their hand on his head during a ministry time and said, ‘It’s OK, Ron. Jesus has heard your call for help (911) and he says it’s going to be all right.’ The peace of the Lord came over Ron then, and that was the last time he asked us to call 911. Who can understand the ways of the Lord and our responses to him? All along, way down deep in his spirit, Ron had just been crying desperately for help. Jesus is the only one who can be that help, for all of us ... Seeing Ron receive as a child really helped me to receive. The Lord touched me so many ways in the last few weeks ... I felt his power so strongly in my body one night, I became fearful that I was going to die; I have also felt an incredible presence of peace like never before ... ” (Guy Chevreau: Catch The Fire, Canada: Harper Perennial 1994, p155-156).

Call 911 – call 000 – if you want – but – do not fear – it is going to be all right. We have peace with God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is only going to confirm this fact to you. Are we beginning to get a handle on the baptism with the Holy Spirit? Yes? Hear a few more testimonies of the ultimate – the absolute best – what anyone can receive from God: “I [Dora Bittermann] can hardly explain in words what is going on deep in my heart. All things I am describing now are an increasing process. Jesus has removed many of my life’s pains, and lifted my burdens ... He has led me to repentance, and released me from many of

my fears. More and more, he fills me up with his love, his joy, his life. I often feel as if he burns himself into my heart. For the first time in my life, I really feel his love for me ...” (Guy Chevreau: Catch The Fire, Canada: Harper Perennial 1994, p165).

“As they started to pray for me [Belma Vardy], I felt a heat penetrate through my face. I felt as if the Lord’s face was right against mine, and it seemed as though his love began to fill me” (Guy Chevreau: Catch The Fire, Canada: Harper Perennial 1994, p177). “ ... while praying with my eyes closed, the Lord showed me [Terry Bone] a picture of my soul, after which I saw a large hand come down and remove something marked FEAR. At that moment, I perceived that the Lord was removing from me the fear of that which is phony, and the fear of loss of control – which, for me, go hand in hand. A few seconds later, I fell backwards on to the floor where I stayed for over half an hour weeping, while the Spirit of God did some inner healing. I wasn’t very orderly that day” (Guy Chevreau: Catch The Fire, Canada: Harper Perennial 1994, p184). “ ... Later on my twelve-year-old son came forward and said, ‘I think kids can receive too, Dad’. As soon as he raised his hands, he began to sob, fell to the floor, and soon began to laugh louder and longer than ever in his life. After thirty minutes, he began to flow with Spirit-given language for the first time! This was followed by my ten-year-old daughter falling to the floor and remaining there, hands extended upward, praising God” (Guy Chevreau: Catch The Fire, Canada: Harper Perennial 1994, p186).

This is for children also. You may be here in church this morning and you may be only ten years old but know this: The promise is also for you. You are not too young. If you want the gift, pray to God that he will also fill you with the Holy Spirit.

How do we receive this? At this point of time are we all wanting – desiring – to be baptized with the Holy Spirit – maybe for the first time or receiving refreshments? God thought that it was worth sending an angel to Cornelius so that he would receive the gift. Do we now want the same gift and how do we get it?

The short answer is: Look to Jesus and let him do it – for you. You cannot make it happen for yourself. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a gift that comes from him. You need to wait on God – allow him to do it for you in his way – even the first Christians waited on God for days before they received the outpouring of the Spirit – but – at the same time – you are not completely passive during this waiting period. You can position yourself or let God position you. Again – we learn from Cornelius. According to the Bible you can get ready for receiving from God.

The Bible account introduced Cornelius with these words – Acts 10:2: “He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.” This came to the attention of God and for that reason he sent an angel to him, saying – Acts 10:4: “ ... Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God ...” The communication from God is very clear on this point. It was on account of 1) God-fearing prayers and 2) money gifts to the poor that salvation and the baptism with the Holy Spirit came to Cornelius and his family and friends (cf. Acts 10:35).

You may decide to do the same. Fear God and love him by praying to him always and sharing your money with the poor. Then, Jesus himself encouraged us to be very specific in our prayers for the Holy Spirit. He said – Luke 11:9-13: “ ... Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened ... If you ... know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

There is more. As Peter gave his report about Cornelius to his home-church (back in Jerusalem), he concluded by saying – Acts 11:17: “ ... God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ ...” which made the congregation respond with the words – Acts 11:18: “ ... God has granted ... repentance unto life.” From Peter and the church’s perspective the repentance of Cornelius mattered and his faith. They said: “ ... God has granted ... repentance unto life ... God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ ...” Therefore, if we want to receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit, we also repent (in response to God prompting us) and put our faith in Jesus Christ. We look to Jesus.

In summary then, this is how you can position yourself for receiving an outpouring of the Holy Spirit: repent, believe in Jesus, pray and give away money to the poor. [One additional observation: God responded to the prayers and money giving of Cornelius but then not only Cornelius was baptized in the Spirit.

All of his family and friends also came under the anointing which may be an incentive for us today to seek out the company of God-fearing people because we may share in their blessings.]

However, at this point I may also mention one obstacle that most of us need to overcome before we can receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit. I am talking about fear which is the opposite to faith. In the testimonies from before fear was a recurring theme. What if anything weird happens? What if I lose control? What if this is all fake and hysteria? What will others think and say about me?

The fear factor is an issue for most of us because the sensation of being overcome with God – maybe bursting with strong emotions or physical reactions – is not something that we can easily get our heads around. God is so big and so holy.

Then, the fear – for many people – gets heightened because when Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit, he frequently targets one of the key-strongholds of human power and control, that is: our tongue. Many a time with the baptism of the Holy Spirit comes the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues. Many a time when – in the Bible – people were baptized in the Spirit, they all – without exception – received the gift of tongues (cf. Acts 2:1-5; Acts 19:6). This can be scary – to yield control of something so personal as your tongue to God. And it is so humbling because it offends the control of the human mind. Is this not just babbling and blabbering – speaking out words given by the Spirit which you do not understand?

In my limited experience there are numerous people who shut themselves off to the baptism with the Holy Spirit because they cannot come to grips with the gift of speaking in tongues – therefore resisting this gift – insisting that the Spirit baptism has to happen without it. And indeed – God may pour out his Spirit and not release the gift of tongues in you – at least not straight away (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:1,5) – but we don't make the rules.

Even a few weeks ago (May 09) – at the end of our Friday night prayer watch – I had the impression that I should ask a young man whether he already spoke in tongues and whether he wanted to receive this gift. We prayed for him and after the prayer he thanked us for the experience but I asked him what had happened. He said that he had felt the Holy Spirit on him and that something lifted his tongue inside his mouth. Then he became scared and stopped the encounter. Fear blocked him.

A Lutheran pastor friend (Dirk Willner) shared with me that – when he was at the Bible College – another student prayed for him and at that time he also felt the Holy Spirit causing tingling sensations all over his body and he also felt his tongue moving but all those years ago he panicked. He thought: “If this goes any further and the Holy Spirit makes me speak in tongues, maybe I will be kicked out of the Bible College and cannot become a pastor. What will my parents think of me?” So – with fear rising – he stopped the encounter and was not baptized in the Spirit until many years later.

Fear is a frustrating reality because even the people who want the fullness of God can become afraid when the unexpected happens. I myself am so desperate for more of God but then on two different occasions (May 2009) in a dream God took me into an encounter where I felt the presence of God coming onto me and God showing me visions – it was beautiful – but I did not understand everything that happened in the dream and therefore stopped what was happening. I woke up – to my great frustration. Fear is not faith and we receive by faith.

This is where Cornelius had an advantage. When the angel came, he was at first scared of him but then the angel assured him of God's favour and set him up for the preaching engagement with Peter. By the time he finally heard the message of Jesus Christ he was brimming with positive expectations because he knew that God had something planned for him and that it would be good. God has something good for us this morning.

In closing I want to touch briefly on the purposes of the Spirit baptism. Why does Jesus want to baptize you with the Holy Spirit? The number one reason is love. When Jesus was baptized in the Spirit himself, the following happened – Luke 3:22: “... the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased’” (cf. Matthew 17:5). The same happens for us. When we are immersed in the Spirit and presence of God, we hear the same voice from heaven – clearly – saying to us: “I love you. You are my child. Heaven is your inheritance. You are precious to me.” An assurance comes on us that we are saved.

The Bible refers to this experience as being “sealed” with the Holy Spirit (stamp of approval) or receiving the Holy Spirit as a “deposit” – a down payment (in the hands of our experience) of what is to come in heaven. 2 Corinthians 1:20-22: “... [God] anointed us, set his seal on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” 2 Corinthians 5:1-10: “... Now it is God who has made us ... and has

given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore we are always confident ... We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body [would prefer to be dead] and at home with the Lord [in heaven] ...” [Ephesians 1:13-14: “ ... you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth ... [then] having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance [in heaven] ... “ Ephesians 4:30: “ ... the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”]

The practical outcome of this is that we call God “Abba/Dear Father/Daddy”. We are secure in the love of God. Hence, the Bible says – Romans 8:14-16: “ ... you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

[Martin Lloyd-Jones: God’s Ultimate Purpose. An Exposition Of Ephesians 1:1 to 23, Edinburgh: The Banner Of Truth Trust 1978, p283-284: “There is a very beautiful illustration of this aspect in the works of ... Dr Richard Sibbes, another of the great Puritans of 300 years ago. Dr Sibbes says that the difference between the conversion experience and the ‘sealing’ can be stated thus. It is like a child who has been a little mischievous and disobedient, who has a sense of guilt and is unhappy, and who keeps on running back to his father. The father receives him but he does not smile much at him. This is the father’s way of reprimanding him and of punishing him for his disobedience; but the child by running back gets a certain satisfaction when he is with his father. This may go on for some time. Then one day as they are walking along a road together the child presses near to his father and touches him. The father continues just to look at him; but then after a while takes hold of the child, lifts him up and fondles him in his arms and showers his love upon him. That is the difference! Without the sealing of the Spirit you can know that your sins are forgiven; but not in this special and certain manner. This goes beyond the initial experience of forgiveness; this is God, if I may so express it, endearing us and showering his love upon us, overwhelming us ... ”

The second reason for receiving the Spirit is power. Peter told Cornelius that Jesus himself operated in power because of the Spirit. He said – Acts 10:38: “ . God anointed [baptized] Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, ... [so that] he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.” Jesus promised the same to his disciples. He said – Acts 1:4-8: “ ... you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit ... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; then you will be my witnesses ... “ According to the Bible we Christians do mission work – Romans 15:19: “by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit ... “ Baptized in the Spirit we will say with the Bible – 1 Corinthians 2:4-5: “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration [an experience] of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.” 1 Thessalonians 1:5: “ ... our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction ... ” [1 Corinthians 4:20: “ . the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.” Ephesians 1:18-23: “ ... you may know ... his incomparable great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead ... “ Ephesians 3:20: “ ... able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power ... “ 2 Timothy 3:5: “[People that are] having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.” Cf. Zechariah 4:6; Luke 4:16-19; John 14:12]

When the Holy Spirit is poured out, there is power for preaching, driving out demons, protection from danger, healings and miracles. This is also where spiritual power gifts find their place – wisdom, knowledge, administration, healings, miracles, faith and prophecy (cf. 1 Corinthians 12; Hebrews 2:4).

Yet – another key realm of experiencing power is personal holiness. The Holy Spirit gives you power over sin and enables you to resist temptation. The Bible says – Romans 6:14: “ . sin shall not be your master ... ” Romans 8:9-17: “You . are controlled not by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you ... by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body ...” Galatians 6:16: “ ... live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” Thus, if you are caught in a sin that you cannot seem to shake, seek more of the Spirit and become free.

This is the end of the message. Do we want this now for ourselves? Are we ready for the love and power? This was on God’s mind from the beginning – Acts 10:44: “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.” Cornelius and those with him ended up speaking in tongues and praising God. There were no regrets – only joy. Therefore, look to Jesus – without fear – and receive. Amen.

The Appointment 6 – The Word Key

What is the number one key that determines whether you receive anything from God? What – according to the Scriptures – is to be at the core of your life? What determines the depth of your relationship with God and whether you will make it long-term as a Christian? We have one last look at Cornelius. He experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit – a complete submersion into the presence of God – that is promised to all of us. I read from the Bible – Acts 10:44-47: “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message ... The . believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on them [original: the Gentiles]. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.” This was the ultimate best that could happen to Cornelius and anyone. God poured out on them the Holy Spirit – his manifest presence – which made them break forth with praise – joy that could not be contained (*even in the presence of strangers*).

I give you another example of one such experience which is promised to every Christian even though the precise details of our experiences vary. Charles Finney writes in his memoirs: “As I went in and shut the door after me it seemed as if I met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face ... He said nothing, but looked at me in such a manner as to break me right down at His feet ... I fell down ... and poured out my soul to Him. I wept aloud like a child, and made such confessions as I could with my choked utterance. It seemed to me as if I bathed His feet with my tears ...

I returned to the front office and found that the fire ... was nearly burned out. But as I returned and was about to take a seat by the fire. I received a mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost. Without expecting it, without every having the thought in my mind that there was any such thing for me, without any recollection that I had ever heard the thing mentioned by any person in the world, at a moment entirely unexpected by me, the Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression, like a wave of electricity, going through and through me. Indeed it seemed to come in waves, and waves of liquid love – for I could not express it in any other way. And yet it did not seem like water, but rather as the breath of God. I can recollect distinctly that it seemed to fan me like immense wings; and it seemed to me, as these waves passed over me, that they literally moved my hair like a passing breeze.

No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. It seemed to me that I should burst. I wept aloud with joy and love, and I do not know but I should say I literally bellowed out the unutterable gushings of my heart. These waves came over me, and over me, and over me one after the other, until I recollect I cried out, ‘I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me.’ I said to the Lord, ‘Lord, I cannot bear any more.’ Yet I had no fear of death” (Charles Finney: The Original Memoirs Of Charles G. Finney, Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1989, p16).

(Short of spending eternity in heaven) there is nothing better available from God than variations of what Finney experienced – but now you have to understand the number one key for this to happen again and again. How can you make sure that after the initial baptism in the Holy Spirit, you will receive further outpourings – further drenchings and soakings in the Spirit of God?

The answer is contained in the first Bible verse which I read to you before. Hear the same verse again – Acts 10:44: “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.” This is how it happened. A sermon was preached – Peter took his position and spoke the words and the congregation was listening to him – which then bore the result that the spoken words released the presence of God. Without question – it was the sermon of Peter – while he was still speaking – that bore the fruit of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

This is the key for you to receive even more from God: Get into his word. Hear from him. At first we may have looked at the Cornelius story and wondered why God took such great trouble in setting up a simple preaching engagement. Remember: God had sent an angel to Cornelius who told Cornelius that he was to send messengers after Peter who resided in another city – a few hours journey along the coast. Then – while the angel was busy with Cornelius – God let Peter fall into trance and gave him a vision which included hearing a voice from heaven. The whole point of the exercise was that Peter would agree to go to Cornelius and not look down upon him because he did not belong to the people of God. The whole point of the exercise was to set up a preaching engagement. God pulled out all stops (so it seems) to make it happen – Acts 10:19-20 – I read from the actual account: “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.’”

Finally, the preacher and his congregation came together and – by that time – they all knew the importance of this. Cornelius spelled it out clearly – Acts 10:33: “... Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.” **Then the sermon was preached and the Spirit released. The key was the message which Peter acknowledged again in his subsequent report to his home congregation. He said to the church in Jerusalem – Acts 11:13-15: “Cornelius told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved. As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them ...’” “He will bring you a message *through which* you and all your household will be saved.” The message is the means of access to God.**

Here I may add that Cornelius also had the faith to receive the word. The angel prepared him well. He was not like those about whom the Bible says – Hebrews 4:2: “... the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.”

At first Cornelius made the common mistake – sometimes even our mistake – of thinking that the key to God’s blessings was not so much the message but the messenger – the person of Peter. Therefore, we read in the Bible – Acts 10:25-26: “As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. ‘Stand up,’ he said, ‘I am only a man myself.’” Peter was not the key. He was an instrument of God – commissioned by God – filled with the Holy Spirit – as we all can be – but he was not brilliant. He was like the rest of us. When God commanded him in the vision – Acts 10:13: “... Get up, Peter. Kill [some of these four-footed animals and reptiles which you see] and eat,” Peter refused God – point blank – more than once in the same vision – saying to God – Acts 10:14: “Surely not, Lord. I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” **Are these the words of a great preacher: “Surely not, Lord. How can you ask me to do something that is wrong?”** Then – for all of his experience – Peter (or at least those with him) were surprised that the preaching bore any results. The Bible records – Acts 10:45: “[They] ... were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on these people [original: the Gentiles].”

On the one hand – the Bible does admonish us to honour – 1 Timothy 5:17: “*especially those who labour in the word and doctrine*” but – on the other hand – the messengers are never the key – the word of God is. Now – what is the word of God? What – precisely – is the core content of the message which releases the anointing? We can easily go wrong here because God is speaking to us all of the time and he produced a lot of excitement in our Bible account. He sent a messenger angel to Cornelius who – at first – stared at the angel in fear but then conversed with him. Peter experienced a trance, a vision, a voice from heaven, a Holy Spirit impression – so much was going on and all for the purpose of letting people hear from God what he wanted them to do. And for us it is the same. We also expect to hear from God – words of direction, guidance, ... Even today messenger angels are visiting Christians and people fall into trances. There are some that receive visions from heaven – and this may have already happened to you or will happen to you – but these words of God – as exciting as they are – they are not the main word of God. They are part and parcel of an alive relationship with God but not the core content of salvation.

All of these prophetic communications only served to set up Peter’s sermon – the preaching of the main point – which Peter himself specified as the following – Acts 10:36: “You know *the word* which God [original: he] sent to the people of Israel telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all.” **What is *the word*? Peace with God through Jesus Christ. With this word Peter began his sermon and then – later – also concluded his sermon, confirming the same at the end – Acts 10:42-43: “Jesus commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” “... everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”** This is becoming crystal clear. The word of God is peace through Jesus Christ – forgiveness of sins through him – for everyone who believes in him. It was this message that released the Spirit on Cornelius and his family.

This is very practical. Whatever you do in life, keep this word central in your heart – never fail to meditate on the magnitude of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross – what it means that the holy one poured out his blood for you. Keep this word alive in your estimation – don’t become bored with what you think that you know. This is deeper than we will ever appreciate and this is more powerful than we will ever know – Acts 10:44: “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.” [Revelations 5:2-14: “*And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll? But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look*

inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.' Then I saw a lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the centre of the throne ... And when he had taken the scroll ... they sang a new song: 'You are worthy ... because you were slain and with your blood you purchased people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation ...' Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels ... 'Worthy is the lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!' Then ... every creature ... 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power for ever and ever!' ... "]

In like manner – **another preacher in the Bible said** – 1 Corinthians 2:1-5: “When I came to you ... I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified ... but [and now notice what he adds] ... my preaching came with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power ...” Here again – **the resolve to preach nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified** – the singular focus on the main message – **released the power of the Holy Spirit. Can we understand now why the Bible can strike such a note of celebration, saying** – Romans 1:16: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes ...” **We make this our own. Never tire of the gospel** – the core word. **Never be ashamed of the gospel** – ever – **because the content of what you share releases power** – for salvation.

All right – what have we said so far? The key for you to receive from God is the word of God – and the word is not so much what angels may tell you or what you may receive in visions – but – always – **the main message of salvation: Jesus Christ and him crucified. Through this word the power comes. Through the name of Jesus – and him crucified – you can operate in power. For instance, this is how the disciples healed a man with crippled legs. They said** – Acts 3:6: “... In the name of Jesus ... walk.” “In the name of Jesus – and what he did on the cross for us – walk.” [Cf. *Philippians 2:9-11.*]

[*Maybe here I make another reference to the faith component which is necessary to wield the word of power. The disciples – who healed the man with crippled legs – also made reference to the importance of faith. They told the crowd – Acts 3:16: “By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name [the author of the salvation message] and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him ...*”]

Now – I want to expand on this and draw your attention to another detail in Peter’s sermon. He explained to Cornelius that – Acts 10:43: “... all the prophets testify about Jesus that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” **which was bringing to Cornelius’ attention that the Bible** (the prophetic books) **confirmed what he was preaching. Jesus himself emphasized the importance of the Bible. After he rose from the dead, he said to his disciples** – Luke 24:44-47: “... ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms [that is: the parts of the Bible that were written before Jesus was born – the Old Testament].’ Then Jesus opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name ...”

The is again practical for us. We read our Bibles and as we read, we discover that so much of the Bible points to Jesus Christ – and him crucified – **and** – therefore – **the more we read, the more the word of God releases power into our lives. Peter preached the Bible to Cornelius and therefore – as we keep reading the Bible for ourselves – the same can happen as happened through the preaching of Peter** – power is released. **The Holy Spirit comes on us. This is the key: Come under the word of God. Read the Bible. Treasure the Bible.** [*And let this be the culture of our church – Colossians 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom ...*”]

This is also the key for long-term success. We love to be filled with the Holy Spirit and be filled again and again – but everything that is to come – a long-term relationship with God – is determined by what we do with the word of salvation. Jesus told this parable – I read from the Bible – Luke 8:5-8: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.” **The disciples did not understand what Jesus was saying and therefore Jesus explained the parable to them, saying** – Luke 8:11-15: “This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who

hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop."

This is a most sobering parable. Lots of people get attracted to God when they see him do miracles and experience his love and joy. It is a good day when you can leave the old life behind and put your trust in God. But – unless you nurture the word of salvation – let it grow in you – this will not last. Consider again this one verse: “Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.” You cannot sustain the initial joy, if you do not let the word put down roots in your life. A life with God is not about being zapped with wonderful experiences which you think are going to sustain you. A life with God is determined by what you do with his word and this will require from you discipline, study, perseverance, standing against the devil and temptations, and saying no to what chokes your relationship with God – the worries of life, riches and pleasures (endless distractions). You hold on and retain the word in all circumstances – even when you feel flat – and then – and only then – will you experience that power is released through the word – again and again in your life – to the effect that – according to the parable – the word in you – the one seed – produces a hundred-fold increase in others.

In the Bible you can read about others who have let the word of God grow in them. A mentor gave the following advice to a young church leader – the advice is recorded in the Bible itself – 2 Timothy 3:14-17 – he said: “ ... continue in what you have learned ... you know those from whom you learned it ... from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness ... ” Therefore – according to this advice and the experience of many – if we want an ongoing life in the Spirit of God, we treasure the Bible.

And just in case that we think that this is not exciting enough, there is this testimony from a man with a strong prophetic gift. He writes: “I remember the lady in my . church setting, who, although very proper and very nice, upset me by continually asking me to give her a word from the Lord. One day she came up and said, ‘Mr Cain, do you have a word from the Lord for me?’ This time she pushed me over the edge. Holding up a Bible, I said, ‘Oh, yes, dear lady. Here is a whole book of them! Take this and read it for yourself.’ Well, as dramatic as that was, she thought I was under the anointing, and she took the Bible, read it, and became a walking Bible. I saw her a year later ... and she was aflame, aglow. She was the head of the Women’s Aglow [a Bible study organization]! It was wonderful ... ” (Paul Cain: The Role Of The Word, in: Paul Cain – R.T. Kendall, The Word And The Spirit, Lake Mary: Creation House 1998, p24). **The Bible can satisfy any craving for a word from God – for you. There is a whole book of them.**

[And still another point – the more we master the book, the more God can make use of what we have studied. For instance, when Peter was wondering about the Spirit on Cornelius, the Bible records that – Acts 11:16: “ ... he remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” The more we learn, the more God can make us remember when we need the information – according to Jesus’ promise – John 14:26: “ ... the Holy Spirit ... will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”]

How are you feeling right now? Do we gain an appreciation for the word of God – the number one key that determines whether we receive anything from him? Are you ready now to get into the word with eagerness and enthusiasm? Let me ask you a practical question: What are your plans? Will you read the Bible tonight before you go to sleep or tomorrow before you go to work? When Peter preached his sermon to Cornelius, the Spirit was released. There is power in the word of God. It determines whether you make it long-term with God.

Maybe in this last segment of my sermon I spend some more time – hammering how powerful the word of God is. According to the Bible – God spoke the world into existence – 2 Peter 3:5: “ ... by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed ... ” – and even now the Son Jesus Christ is – Hebrews 1:3: “ ... sustaining all things [that is: the universe] by his powerful word ... ” Further – Hebrews 4:12: “ . the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword ... judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” Ephesians 6:17: “ ... the sword of the Spirit . is the word of God.” **In a most dramatic**

vision Jesus is armed with a sword that is coming from his mouth – words of power – Revelations 19:11-16: “I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True ... his name is the Word of God ... Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations ...”

Then, there are further references how the word of God brings us into salvation – 1 Peter 1:23-25: “ . you have been born ... through the living and enduring word of God ... ” James 1:18: “God chose to give us birth through the word of truth ... ” [Colossians 1:6: “ ... this gospel is bearing fruit and growing ... ” Ephesians 5:26: “ ... cleansing . by the washing with water through the word ... ”] 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6: “ . our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction ... you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.” 1 Thessalonians 1:13: “ ... the word of God . is at work in you who believe.” [Cf. 1 Timothy 4:5.]

This goes further still. God made an absolute commitment to confirm his word with power – the release of Spirit power in the form of visible demonstrations. Hebrews 2:3-4: “ ... This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord ... God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit ... ” **Jesus invited people to trust him**, saying – John 10:38: “ ... even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.” John 14:11: “ ... believe on the evidence of the miracles ... ” **Peter issued the same invitation in his first sermon after Jesus ascended to heaven** – Acts 2:22: “ ... listen to this: Jesus ... was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.” [Cf. Mark 16:20.]

Whenever the word of God is proclaimed – salvation in the name of Jesus Christ – **we can expect power demonstrations. Think about what this means for us as a church. What the apostle Paul wrote, will be our testimony** – 1 Corinthians 2:4-5: “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power” (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:17). **We will pray like the first Christians** – Acts 4:29-30: “Now Lord, ... enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness by stretching out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” **And we will experience the same as the Christians in the Bible** – Acts 14:3: “ ... the Lord . confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.” Acts 8:6: “When the crowd heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said.”

How is our excitement level now? This is the key. With God – words are not mere words. They are power and power confirms them. His word sustains the universe, cuts like a double-edged sword – always accomplishes what it declares. And what is most amazing – (I have made mention of it already) **people like Peter who was preaching to Cornelius** – and people like you and I – **we speak his word – with the same power. When the disciples returned to Jesus with joy**, saying – Luke 10:17: “ ... Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name,” **Jesus let them know** – Luke 10:16: “He who listens to you, listens to me ... ” “He who listens to you, listens to me ... ” **God lets us have his word** – in our mouth – **to speak it with all of his power. Wow!** [Not even the angels have this privilege. Cf. Acts 10.]

Therefore, what remains for us to do now is to speak the word and use the very key that releases the Holy Spirit. Where do we begin? What are we to say? Preaching the same sermon that Peter preached to Cornelius would be a good start. But then the Bible lets us peek into the depth of our salvation – the incomparable richness of God’s grace – **and the sermon becomes rather long because** – Ephesians 1:3: “ ... the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . has blessed us ... with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” 2 Corinthians 1:20: “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ ... ” **Imagine! Whatever promise we find the Bible, it is our to declare** – to speak all of them into existence. **What a fun way to read the Scriptures.**

After decades of doing healing ministry an evangelist (Bill Johnson) discovered that whenever he announced in a church meeting that it is the most normal thing for tumors to disappear in the presence of Lord, in eighty per cent of church meetings they would disappear in numerous people. When he did not make the declaration, they could have ten days of meetings with an overwhelming sense of the presence of God but no healing of tumors. The speaking out of God’s truth – his promise – would release the healing.

My own experience over the last two years has been that whenever I preach that Jesus Christ defeated Satan on the cross – whenever I speak out the truth that demons need to leave in Jesus’ name – **they**

would stir and people would be set free. When I don't preach on this topic, we don't experience the same kind of confrontation with the kingdom of darkness. [Cf. Luke 4:39; 8:24.]

The word of God is the key – for everything. **How well do you know your Bible? What further promises can we declare? I give you three** – Romans 8:28: “... in all things God works for the good of those who love him ...” 1 Corinthians 10:13: “... God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” James 4:7: “... Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Now – are we ready to release the power? Then – let's speak in agreement: “On account of Jesus Christ and him crucified – no matter what is happening in your life right now, God works for the good of you.” “This temptation will not get the better of you.” “The devil will flee from you.”

As Christians we use the word key to Spirit power every day. In closing I want to mention two more of God's best words – that is: (water) baptism and Holy Communion – **which from ancient times have been called “visible words”** (Augustine). **There is much power in both of them as** – in their case – **the core content of salvation is acted out in words and deeds** – not only heard with our ears but also experienced in water, bread and wine. **As soon as a person repents and becomes a Christian, he is invited to be baptized in Jesus' name which makes him experience the power of salvation as Jesus declares to him in this act:** “I have washed you clean from sin. Your old life has died in the water and you are now raised up with me.” [Cf. Romans 6:2-7; Galatians 3:27.] **The Bible explains** – 1 Peter 3:21: “... baptism . now saves you ... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ ...”

The other visible word – Holy Communion – **is spoken out many times throughout our lives. Jesus commanded us to** – Luke 22:19: “... do this in remembrance of him [original: me].” **One day before he died Jesus conveyed the message of salvation in a meal. He was sitting together with his disciples when he took the bread and declared over it** – Luke 22:10: “This is my body given for you ...” **and he spoke over the wine** – Luke 22:20: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” **Then the further explanation is given that** – 1 Corinthians 11:26: “... whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

This is a visible word of power because we not only hear about the death of Jesus and salvation through his broken body and blood. We act it out – by his command – **and experience the taste of his sacrifice in bread and wine. Every time we have Holy Communion we remember and reenact and bring into the present the words which Jesus himself spoke:** “This is my body – for you. This is my blood – for you – a new covenant of forgiveness. Receive it – now.” [Cf. prophetic actions.]

I finish here. If you want God, love his word. It was when Peter preached his sermon to Cornelius that the Spirit was released. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. Derek Prince: They Shall Expel Demons, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books 1988, p72-74.

ⁱⁱ John Wimber & Kevin Springer: Power Healing, London: Hodder & Stoughton 1986, p120: “I believe that most temptations are the result of our own choices and the influence of the world (Jeremiah 17:9; Mark 7:20-23; James 1:14-15). But Scripture also describes a second category of temptation, which involves more direct demonic influence.”

ⁱⁱⁱ Carlos Annacondia: Listen To Me Satan, Lake Mary: Charisma House 1998, p14-15: “Even though I was still working, the most important thing in my life was serving the Lord, not making money. This was a difficult situation for the members of my family who didn't know the Lord and couldn't accept that my life was devoted to him ... During those first days of my walk with the Lord, something astounding was happening to me. During my times of prayer, God always showed me the shantytowns. At night when I closed my eyes, I could see poor areas that were shunned by society: children going barefoot and houses made of cardboard and corrugated iron roofs. At first I could not understand what God meant, and I thought I had to leave or give away my possessions, including my share of the company – simply give everything to the poor. I felt burdened by the Lord and spent many days praying and crying, not finding any peace. When I prayed with Maria concerning this, the Holy Spirit touched her and she said, ‘I am with you.’ But I couldn't find any comfort.

One afternoon, I told Maria, ‘I want to leave everything behind and move to Chaco to preach in the jungle. Do you want to come with me?’ Her response was, ‘I'll go wherever you go.’ That same afternoon I left my home and decided to give everything away. The first thing I did was give my father my brand-new car since he needed one.

Then I went to talk to my pastor, Brother Gomelski. After giving some thought to what I was telling him, he said, ‘You have worked very hard to obtain what you have; you didn't steal it. Therefore, use your assets for God only when he asks you.’ That moment I felt as Abraham did when he lifted his knife, ready to kill his son. When God saw his servant didn't hesitate but was willing to carry out his orders, even handing over his own son, God stopped Abraham's hand. God realized that my treasure was not

composed of my material belongings but of my love for him and for the lost. Today I realize that it would have been a mistake to give up everything, since for many people, including my family, it would have been more of a scandal than a blessing.”