

# Ministry From Acts 10

by William MacDonald

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*William MacDonald's sermon emphasizes the importance of love and acceptance in ministry, as illustrated by Peter's vision and the outreach to Gentiles in Acts 10.*

**Duration:** 35:10

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Acts 10:9-16, Galatians 6:15

**Topics:** "Ministry"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on Acts chapter 10, verses 9 through 16, which tells the story of Peter and how God prepared him for the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles. Peter goes up to the rooftop to pray and while waiting for food, he falls into a trance and sees a vision of a sheet descending from heaven. The speaker emphasizes the importance of accepting people as they are and hoping that they will grow and mature under our loving care. The sermon also highlights the need for hospitality and love in the world, using examples from a poem and a personal story to illustrate the impact of showing kindness to others.

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## Transcript

I think we'll just get on with our message for today, and in order to do that, would you turn to Acts chapter 10, verses 9 through 16. Acts chapter 10, verses 9 through 16. This is about Peter and how the Lord was preparing him for the great change that had come, where the gospel was going to go out to the Gentiles, not only to the Jews, but to the Gentiles as well.

And Peter's describing what happened. He says in verse 9, In the next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray about the sixth hour. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat, but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven open, and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners descending to him and let down to the earth.

The four corners, the four points of the compass, the gospel's going to go out to all the world, huh? North, south, east, west. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, Rise, Peter, kill and eat.

But Peter said, Not so, Lord. I have never eaten anything common or unclean. And a voice spoke to him again the second time, What God has cleansed, you must not call common.

This was done three times, and the object was taken up into heaven again. You see, God was going to send Peter to a Gentile named Cornelius, a Gentile. Peter had always been a good Jew.

He had only eaten kosher food. He never ate any four-footed animal, for instance, that didn't chew the cud and have cloven hoofs. Never did.

He was a stickler for his diet, and of course to him the Gentiles were a very depraved people. I tried to think this morning what it would be like for us. It would be like being sent to a ward in a hospital with a very infectious disease, you know, something like that.

And Peter was absolutely repulsed at the thought of going to the Gentiles. He had problem accepting the Gentiles. And so God gives him this great vision of the sheep let down from heaven with all manner of four-footed, these creeping things, birds of the air.

And he says, Rise, Peter, kill them. And then Peter uttered that famous contradiction, Not so, Lord. Not so, Lord.

Well, if he's Lord, you can't say not so. If you say not so, he's not Lord. But God said what God has cleansed, you must not call common.

Common or unclean. And Peter's now going to go to, he's prepared now to go to Cornelius and tell him the good news of salvation. I'd like to think about that today in the assembly setting.

I love the assemblies. I've been in an assembly all my life before I was ever saved. I was brought up in that fellowship.

And I love to see the assemblies prosper. And I travel an awful lot, as you know, in the United States and overseas. And I've been thinking a lot about this whole subject lately.

Why don't we see assemblies growing more? We want them to grow. Why don't we see them grow? We pray for the Lord to send people to us. And people do come in, but we can't keep them.

But that's not unique to us either. That's a very common problem today. People come, they listen, they don't come back.

What's the matter? I want to think about that with you today because I think a lot about it. Let me suggest to you, when they come in, they're not interested in whether we have plural leadership or not. Most of them don't know anything about plural leadership.

They're not interested in whether we have several elders. It's not what's on their mind. They're not interested in whether we practice the priesthood of all believers.

I mean, that's foreign language to them. They don't know anything about these things. Frankly, they're not interested whether we break bread every Lord's Day or not.

Those things are far from them. What are they interested in? They're interested in love. That's what they're interested in.

They live in an unfriendly world. And many of them have very few friends. I had a funeral within the last two months, I think.

Lady in the next apartment to me and her son, grown-up son, successful businessman in Castro Valley said to me, if you have three friends in life, you're well off. That's what he said. And of course, it was just a handful of people there at the funeral.

Just a handful. People are dying today for a little bit of love. They really are.

And so it made me think, well, what kind of a reception do we give the unsaved when they come? Are we giving them really what they want? And that's why I thought of Peter and Cornelius. The greatest division that has ever come in the world was the division between Jew and Gentile. It was actually set up by God through the law.

And now God is breaking it down here in Acts chapter 10, and the middle wall of partition is gone, and God is making a new society, Jew and Gentile, one person in Christ. When we pray to the Lord to send people to us, we can't dictate who he's going to send or what kind of people he's going to send. Can't do that.

You know, there's a little assembly up in Napa, and they live quite close to the mental asylum there. I forget what they call it. But anyway, you know, where people with mental disorders used to go in droves.

And a lot of those people would get out on a pass and they'd go to the various churches in Napa. But the church was kind of uncomfortable. And actually, there are evangelical churches in Napa who told the people to go to the assembly, gave them the name and address of the assembly.

The assembly received them. And they kept going. They kept going because they found acceptance there, and they found love there.

They found people who were interested in them. Some of them didn't look like the most elegant people you've ever seen. They didn't dress elegantly or all the rest, but God loved them.

And they really found a church home there. There's a preacher in Brooklyn. I've shared this with some of you.

There's a preacher in Brooklyn. His name is Jim Cimbala. I think they started off with 20 people.

And through prayer, the congregation began to grow. I was really touched when he tells this story in a magazine article. It was one Sunday night, and he was really weary.

You know, there's a tremendous expenditure in Christian ministry. Physical, mental, and spiritual. Tremendous expenditure.

I often think of that one. When Jesus healed a person, it says he perceived that virtue had gone out of him. Well, not exactly virtue as we think of it, but what it's really saying, it cost him something to heal that person.

There was an expenditure when he healed the person. Well, that was true with Jim Cimbala. He had come to Sunday night.

During the service, there was a woman in the choir who had given a testimony. I'm not approving, I'm just telling you what happened. A woman in the choir, and she gave a testimony.

She had been a drug addict, and she was HIV positive, AIDS. And she got up and she described some of the horrors of her life before Christ came. She described it in raw detail.

And there was a street person standing at the back of the church building. His name was David. A street person.

And the meeting was over, and Jim Cimbala was exhausted, and all of a sudden he saw David coming down the aisle toward him. And he said, oh no. He's coming for a handout.

He said, I'm so tired. What a pity that this had to happen. Now this guy's going to hit me up for some money.

He said. And David came to him, and when he got close to Jim Cimbala, the smell nearly knocked Jim out. The smell of urine, sweat, garbage, and alcohol.

I put myself in the position of that preacher. How would I have reacted? Pretty repulsive. After a few minutes, after a few words at least, Jim reached into his pocket and pulled out a couple of dollars.

He said, I'm afraid that my posture said what I was thinking. Here's some money. Now get going.

And David looked at him intently, and then he put his finger right in Jim Cimbala's face, and he said, I don't want your money. He said, I want what that woman had. I want Jesus.

Let me just read you how Jim describes his reaction. Actually, what David said is, I don't want your money. I'm going to die out there.

I want the Jesus this woman talked about. Jim said, I paused, then looked up, closed my eyes, and said, God forgive me. For a few moments, I stood with my eyes closed, feeling soiled and cheap.

Then a change came over me. I began to feel his pain, to see him as someone Christ had brought into the church for that moment. I spread out my arms, and we embraced, holding his head to my chest.

I talked to him about his life and about Christ, but it wasn't just words. I felt them. I loved him.

That smell, he said, I don't know how to explain it. He said, it had almost made me sick before, but it became beautiful to me. That's a miracle.

He said, I reveled in what had been repulses. I felt for him what Paul felt for the Thessalonians. He said, we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.

We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Jim said, God put that kind of love in me. The secret to Paul's ministry was what I felt that night.

That divine love became supernatural power. The minute my attitude changed, David knew it. He responded to that love and allowed me to minister to him.

The gospel got through to David that night. I was a detriment until God got me back in tune. I think that's a very, very touching story.

I have 2,000 people in that fellowship today in Brooklyn, and Brooklyn is not a nice place, if you don't mind my saying that. I mean, this man's wife said to him, we've got to get out of here. I can't raise children in this environment.

They stayed. God has used them in a mighty way. It's hard, isn't it? Sometimes it's hard accepting people.

But this spoke to me, and really in a very convicting way it spoke to me. I put myself in that dear man's place and said, how would I have acted in that situation? My experience is that if we reject some people, the Lord will send some who are harder to receive. I think the Lord puts us through tests in life, don't you? If we reject some people, he'll send us others, make it just a little harder.

It speaks to my heart. How do I accept people, unsaved people when they come? Not only that, but how do I accept other Christians, Christians from other fellowships? In all of this, I think we have to realize that we're living in a different world today. It's hard for some of us, especially some of us who are older.

I don't think it's so hard for the younger people to realize this, but some of us who are older. I've often told this story. I've probably told it here about there was a time at Fair Haven when somebody from Fair Haven went down by the railroad tracks, and they found a lot of young people sleeping out there by the railroad tracks.

They reached out to them and brought them in. Actually, they started a house for them down in San Leandro there. One of these young fellows got saved, and one night he showed up at the breaking of bread with bare feet.

One of the dear older sisters went to him afterwards and reprovved him for coming, for the irreverence of coming to the Lord's Supper in bare feet. One of the elders saw what happened. He realized what had happened, and he went and he put his arm around the kid, and he said, never mind.

He said, I think they're beautiful. The kid said, they're original. That's acceptance, isn't it? God isn't interested in whether your feet are bare or not.

That's not what counts with him. It's like the woman who came to Barno's once and said, I wish you'd tell these young women to wear nylon stockings, and he said, Madam, the Virgin Mary didn't wear nylon stockings, and neither she did. I love the story of this happening actually in an assembly in Boston, Massachusetts.

Not one I attended, I'm glad to say, but it happened up there anyway. The assembly was really in a poor state spiritually, and they were having a prayer meeting upstairs, and nothing was happening in the prayer meeting. It was dull, dullsville, and what it really needed was closing down, and all of a sudden they're sitting there in silence, and they hear a thwomp, thwomp, thwomp, somebody coming up the stairs, and it was a very fat black woman coming up the stairs.

She came in, and she sat down. Deadly silence, deadly silence. No one prayed.

Finally, she couldn't stand it any longer. She lifted up her voice and prayed, Lord, this place is dead. You know this place is dead.

It's the deadest place either of us has been in for a long time. After that, there were no silent periods in the meeting. The men started to pray like gangbusters.

Was it an angel? I don't think it was. I don't think it was just a black woman coming in off the street. I think it was an angel, God speaking to an assembly.

I may have told you the story of a man named Henry Varder, a preacher among the assemblies in this country. He wasn't dynamic in the pulpit. He was a man of God.

He knew God, and he had a message from God, but he wasn't particularly dynamic, and his personal appearance wasn't fetching like that at all. He went to an assembly in the Midwest or East, not far from where we were at the conference, and they didn't particularly want him. They suggested that he go down and minister in one of the black assemblies in the ghetto, and he did.

Gracious, you know, he did, and during the week while he was there, he took a heart attack and died. It was as if the Lord was saying to that first assembly, if you don't want him, I do. I'd like to read you a poem that man wrote.

It's one of my favorite poems, believe it or not. It's a tribute to Isaiah, and in it, Mr. Varder pictures himself as traveling over the hills of Palestine, looking for the grave of Isaiah. He wants to put a wreath on Isaiah's grave, because it was Isaiah who led him to the Lord.

On him was laid all thine iniquity. Listen to what he wrote. Where laid ye him, ye Palestinian hills? Tell, if you saw, where laid they Judah's seer? I fain would place a wreath upon his grave, upon its sod let fall a silent tear.

Tis said his body was asunder, sawn by wicked hands. Tradition says that Isaiah was sawn in half, martyrdom. Tis said his body was asunder, sawn by wicked hands, like those that slew our Lord, accepting not deliverance, that he may obtain in resurrection his reward.

Where laid they him? Why are ye silent still? I fain would know, for I his debtor am. My father he, I his posthumous child, for through him I was pointed to the Lamb. He penned the soul-emancipating words that were the means of bringing life to me.

When dead in sins, I wandered far from God, on him was laid all thine iniquity. Wreath did I say? Yes, more, a monument. His name so deep engraved, time shall not dim, and underneath this epitaph inscribed.

He saw his glory, and he spake of him. Are silent still? Hath he who turned the sod on Moab's plain, and buried Israel's seer, enjoined on you this silence? And must ye hold as sacred trust this secret tear? Tis all in vain. I cannot find the place where he was laid, but in eternity it may be that I'll grasp the hand that penned on him was laid all thine iniquity.

He couldn't find the grave, never mind, in heaven he'll shake hands with Isaiah and thank him for writing those words on him was laid all thine iniquity. Would you like to be part of an assembly that sent that man away to the black assembly in the ghetto? Shows you how we really have to be careful in accepting people. I often think of the Lord Jesus and that sinful woman coming in, and the Lord is reclining there, you know, at the table.

They didn't sit in chairs, they reclined more on couches with their heads at the table, and that woman washed his feet. I say to you men, how would you like that? He accepted it. I think we would find it rather difficult.

Edwin Markham wrote that lovely poem, How the Great Guest Came, tells of an old man who repaired shoes, and he made elaborate preparations from a dreamed-of visit from the Lord. He dreamed of this visit from the Lord, and he went about and made elaborate preparations for it. The Lord never came, but a beggar came, and he put shoes on his feet, and an old lady came, and he helped her with her load and gave her some food to take home, and a lost child came, and he took her back to her mother.

Then, soft in the silence, a voice he heard, lift up your heart, for I kept my word. Three times I came to your friendly door, three times my shadow was on your floor. I was the woman you gave to eat, I was a beggar with bruised feet, I was a child on the homeless street.

Of course, the thought is that as much as he did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, he did it unto me. That's always very convicting to me, that the way I treat others is the way I treat the Lord. Somebody wrote this, this was in our daily bread last month, just as the gospel is open to everyone, everyone should feel welcome in our churches.

Wealthy and poor, child and aged, police officer and ex-con, handicapped and athlete are all objects of Christ's love. They are all potential members of his body. May there be no barriers in our churches nor in our hearts toward anyone.

They are all potential members of his body. I think that when people come to us, we have to avoid critical attitudes. I was brought up in in fellowship where you really didn't dare step out of line in any way, or you'd really hear about it.

But I think of the Lord, how he received the disciples just as they were, you know, and then he starts to build on that basis. He received them warts, wrinkles and all, you know, all of their had them too. They had plenty of imperfections and he just took them and then he started to teach them and disciple them.

So many churches today make a fuss when people come to them over bible versions. I'm glad we don't do that. You know, which version of the bible? If you don't use the King James Version, the only true word of God.

People make a fuss over hairstyles. One preacher said, speaking about men, for neither doth long hair avail anything nor short hair but a new creation. It says in Galatians 6, for neither doth circumcision avail anything or uncircumcision but a new creation.

What it's really saying is something more important than those things to God and that is the evidence of the new creation. That's what God's interested in. The new birth and the evidence of that new life in people.

Clothing styles. This will seem funny to you but when I came up from New England here and I've said this before probably and I had a funeral and I saw women at the funeral in pantsuits. I nearly fell in the grave from shock.

You know, I've never seen that before in New England. Today I feel quite comfortable with it. Quite comfortable.

Clothing styles. Whether people say thee and thou. These are things that turn people on.

I just want to say people come to us with problems. Loneliness. I live in a building with I think 17 apartments.

You know, I know a lot of the people in the apartment and most of them have only one friend. That's the television set. I'm serious.

They have only one friend. The television set. They come home.

They never have visitors. Nobody ever comes. They just sit and watch television.

Drink beer or liquor and go back to work the next day. People come to us with problems. Single people have problems.

Terrible problems of loneliness, of non-acceptance. A lot of churches face that problem and have special ministries for those who are single. Many people today have problems with drugs.

Drug dependency. Those are terrible chains that bind people today. They come, many of them looking for help.

People come to us from broken homes. Divorce. Single parents.

Live-in situations. Homosexuality. Child abuse.

Unruly children. That's why I say it's a different ballgame today than it was a few years ago. How do we react to people when they come to us like this? I'd like to suggest to you, and I know this is true for a fact, that many people are in the assemblies today because the first day they ever came, they were invited out for a meal.

I saw it over and over again when I was in the service. I tell you, it can be lonely in the service. It can be lonely in the service.

And some of those fellows would go, went to an assembly, and the very first day they were there, they were invited out. There were other young people there and they're lifelong people in the assemblies today. The first day.

That's the one that really counts. What can we do? Well, we can determine to accept and assimilate people. No matter who they are, we just accept them, show love and kindness to them, and try to assimilate them into the group.

I don't mean accept them as unbelievers, as believers if they're not, but those things can come later. Two, I would suggest that we not dictate to the Lord whom to send. I find myself doing that.

I find myself asking the Lord to send some lively Filipino young people to us. I go to Parkside and they have a mob of them over there, and the place is, you know, is radioactive with activity there. Four, create a friendly atmosphere.

There's an assembly here at Sun Valley out in Lafayette. Jack Davies said once, they can do everything wrong and they can still have a crowd. And they just knew how to love a guy, that's all.

They weren't strong on doctrine, a lot of other things, but they knew how to love a person. And people respond to that. People really respond to that.

Don't quench the spirit. So easy to say something that drives people away. Don't quench the spirit.

Be accepting. I often think of that, and this wouldn't apply in this situation, but somebody asked an old preacher, supposing somebody in the spirit, what would you do? He said, I'd sing it in the spirit. That's the right attitude.

Instead of jumping on the fellow, accept people as they are and hope that they'll grow and mature under your loving care. I think that's it, isn't it? Just accept them the way they are and just hope that in the passing of time they will grow and mature under your loving care. Seven, show hospitality.

This is a hospitable assembly, it really is. I think we want to emphasize that first day that people come there, have some mechanism whereby we're sure they're invited. Even if they don't go, that's not the idea.

The idea is that they were invited. And then just finally, remember that the world is dying for a little bit of love. Some of you who are working in the everyday world, you know that's true.

You know the heartache. You know the loneliness of life today. It's not so true in a rural agricultural society.

It's sure true in a city, isn't it? Sure true in urban life that people, I have never been so lonely in all my life as I was in New York. There are seven million people in New York. Nobody cares.

That creates a spirit of loneliness. When you're in the middle of seven million people and nobody cares a thing about you. Well, there it is.

I think of dear Peter and I think of what a struggle it was for that dear man to go to Cornelius and how the Lord had to prepare him to do it. Apart from that vision of the sheetlet down from heaven, I doubt that he would have ever gone through it all. The Lord taught him what God has cleansed, called thou not common or unclean.

And he went, told him words whereby he might be saved. And here is a trophy of God's wonderful grace. Let's pray.

Father, we just pray for our assembly here as we pray every day. We pray that we might see growth under your good hand. We pray that we might reach out to a sobbing, suffering, sin-sick world.

An unfriendly world. A world of loneliness. A world where people want to end it all.

We just pray that as people come to us that we might reach out to them. That we might show them the love of God for Jesus' sake. And that we might see growth in the days to come.

We ask it in the Savior's worthy and precious name. Amen. Gary has a closing hymn for us.

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