“Good People Need To Be Saved”

Luke 18:18-27

March 26, 2017

Please open your Bible with me to the tenth chapter of the Book of Acts.

Who here knows at least one good person? Everybody here knows some good people. Around us are people you’d count as good; people using their lives to benefit others and to do something good. We see them at work. We have them in our families. So, you know many morally upright people. And, besides that, we like “good” people and we want “good people” around us.

If you’ve been convicted of a crime and are now serving time, you might be paroled early for quote “good” behavior.

Now, here’s something quite interesting. Some of the buses in Washington, DC have the following ads on them: “Why believe in a god? Just be good for goodness’ sake.” This is a campaign poster designed to promotion atheism by the American Humanist Association.

So, won’t you agree with me that everywhere you look today, goodness is promoted? Every society is full of quote “good” people.

Langston Hughes, an American writer and poet, says what a whole lot of people think. He sums it up quite well. *“It has seemed to me that most people are generally good, in every race and every country where I have been.”*

Science is still conducting polls on this very question. Just a few years back Scientific American magazine included an article titled “Scientists Probe Human Nature -- and Discover We Are Good, After All.” It was written by Adrian F. Ward in the November 20, 2012 edition.

The subject of the article was man’s basic goodness. After they’d conducted five studies with 834 participants by researching the issue of whether we’re basically selfish or cooperative, this was their conclusion. *“The results were striking: in every single study, faster — that is, more intuitive — decisions were associated with higher levels of cooperation, whereas slower — that is, more reflective —*

*decisions were associated with higher levels of selfishness. These results suggest that our first impulse is to cooperate —that Augustine and Hobbes [St. Augustine (4th century) and Thomas Hobbes (17th century), two philosophers and theologians] were wrong, and that we are fundamentally “good” creatures after all.”*

And here’s one from the July 2012 issue of The Montreal Review. It’s titled “Humans Are Naturally Good” by T. S. Tsonchev. Here’s one line from the article. *“We are born, stay alive, and die in large degree because of the environment, and we are generally good,…”*

So, seeing yourself from the world’s standards, you’re generally speaking, good. But, if any of us is basically good, then, then I’d ask, “Why did the Father send the Son into the world? And why then did the Father allow the Son to become the Sacrifice for our sins?”

I’ve titled today’s message “Good People Need To Be Saved.” Shall we pray?

The Book of Acts covers the beginning of Christ’s Church; actually the first thirty years of the Church history; and it was written by a medical doctor named Luke probably in 63 AD.

Here’s a quick look at the big picture. The key element in this first Church history book is the progress of the Gospel. The Church, as you know, began in Jerusalem (Acts 1-8). The Church then expanded into Samaria and Judea (Acts 8-12). And then, with the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul, the Church reached out to the entire known world (Acts 13-28). And every advancement of the Church was made as the Gospel spread from town to town and country to country.

So, when you read Acts, you find stories; stories of people who came to know the LORD when they heard the Gospel. Recently, for example, we considered a surprising convert, Saul, the persecutor who became Paul, the preacher. Now most everyone would conclude that before Saul became a Christian, he was bad news. He’d persecuted the Christians and he did everything in his power to stop the advance of the Church. But once he was converted, he began to advance the Gospel personally. So, Paul was a bad man turned into a good man.

Today, I want to have you consider with me the salvation of a good man. This man’s is Cornelius. And the simple word for today is this: Good people need to be saved.

So, why does a quote “good” man or “good” woman need to be saved?

The answer comes from two sources.

First, from the mind and heart of God. How does God view the heart of man? Does He look at the good deeds of men and count that as a solid basis for entry into the Kingdom? Is there anything to the idea that good works save a person’s soul?

The second answer is really from the heart of God as well. What does the Bible say about the state of our hearts?

Here’s Psalm 39:5 *“…verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.”* This word vanity is the idea of a vapor. So, what does the Bible say about man in his best state? He’s like a vapor. The Bible uses the word “vanity.”

Here’s Psalm 62:9 *“Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.”*

What’s a man of low degree or a man of high degree?

It simply means “low born” and “high born.” For example, someone low born would be a person born and raised in Soweto, South Africa. Someone who is high born is someone like this. Here’s Prince William and his wife Kate and their two children Prince George and Princess Charlotte.

Here’s Isaiah 40:15 *“Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: (17) All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.”*

And from the NT, we read this. Luke 18:19 *“And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? None is good, save one, that is, God.”*

So, from the LORD’s viewpoint of our human hearts and from the words of Scripture, mankind isn’t quite as “good” as we want to think we are. So, relatively speaking, there are lots of good people in the world. Many people do many good things.

But, when I come to Acts ten, I ask, “So, then, do good people need to be saved?” Because, as you are about to see, the man in today’s story was a “good” man.

And just one more thing here. I’m not asking if we all have a sense of right and wrong. Rather, I’m concerned with what are we truly like. So, are human beings basically good or basically evil?

Listen with me to Jesus.

Luke 5:32 *“I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”*

And in Mark 2:7 we read this. *“When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, they that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”*

What happens when we take the Bible at face value?

Psalm 14:1 says this *(1) “The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. (2) The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.*

*(3) They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”*

Jeremiah 17:9 *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”*

Matthew 15:19 *“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: (20) These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.”*

Romans 3:23 *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;…”*

So, with the voice of man saying one thing and the voice of God saying another, let’s consider Acts at chapter ten. Look with me at verse one. Acts 10:1 *“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, (2) A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.*

*(3) He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day [about 3:00 p.m.] an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. (4) And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, what is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.*

*(5) And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: (6) He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.*

*(7) And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; (8) And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.”*

Anyone reading this story would conclude that this man, Cornelius was a good man. Let me show you why.

Verse two – he was a devout man. Today we’d say religious or dedicated to his religion.

Verse two – he feared God.

Verse two – he taught his family to fear God.

Verse two - he gave to the poor.

Verse two – he prayed.

And verse three – he received a vision from the LORD.

A devout, God-fearing, praying and giving man; that’s how the Bible describes Cornelius, the Centurion from Italy. And in prayer one day, Cornelius receives a vision from God; verse three. Acts 10:3 “*He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.”*

Now, a vision might be out of the ordinary today. But, it did happen. Scripture tells us, for example, that Joseph, the husband of Mary, had a dream in which an angel spoke to him. This is exactly the same thing. And, besides these people, Joseph had such a dream. Ezekiel had a vision. Daniel also had such a dream.

The story here in Acts ten goes on to describe how this good man comes into contact with the Apostle Peter and this good man is saved.

Now Acts ten actually contain three scenes.

Scene one – Cornelius experiences a vision and is told by the LORD to search out a man by the name of Simon – Acts 10:1-8

Scene two – takes place at the home of the Apostle Peter in Caesarea. He also receives a vision from the LORD – Acts 10:9-33. So Peter, in obedience to the heavenly vision, sets out for the home of Cornelius, some forty miles south in the city of Joppa.

Scene three is the one I have on my heart today. Here we find Peter at the home of Cornelius and what is the message Peter was told by the LORD to bring to this good man, his family and his friends?

Here it is, verse thirty-four. Acts 10:34 *“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: (35) But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. (36)* *The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)*

*(37)* *That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; (38)* *How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.*

*(39)* *And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: (40) Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; (41) Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.*

*(42)* *And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. (43)**To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”*

Can you hear the Gospel ringing out from the lips of Peter as he presents to Cornelius the Person and work of Christ?

Notice the message Peter brings to this good man; verse 34 – God is not partial and shows favoritism to no one. Cornelius might have believed that since he was such a good Roman, a good centurion, a good neighbor, and a helper of the poor that he’d gained favor of some sort from God for his efforts. And I think there are plenty of people who right now think this very same thing.

They think that they’re basically good. They do plenty of good deeds. And, they may even think that since they do such good things, that the LORD will reward them. But, as Peter says, with the LORD, there is no favoritism. He isn’t biased. Peter reminds Cornelius that God isn’t partial. This is the very same word that Paul wrote to the Romans. Romans 2:11 *“For there is no respect of persons with God.”* And here’s Colossians 3:25 *“But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.”*

Folks, God so loves the world that Christ died for the *entire* world and God is not willing *anyone* should perish in Hell.

II Peter 3:9 *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”*

I Timothy 2:3 *“…God our Saviour; (4) Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”*

So Peter is preaching to this good man a God-centered salvation. You see, if you or someone you know is of the opinion that you are good enough or that you’ve worked diligently enough to gain His favor, then your salvation is man-centered; based upon what you can do.

Now, verse 35 – there are people everywhere that fear God and do “righteous” things. And, according to Peter, these people are quote “accepted with Him.”

Now, folks, there are those who say, in light of Peter’s words here, that some people are already accepted by the LORD and don’t need to be saved. But what does the Bible teach? Does it teach that Cornelius needed to be saved? Does it teach that Cornelius needed to be forgiven?

Here’s what Peter goes on to say. Acts 10:43 “*To him [Jesus] give all the prophets witness, that through his [Jesus’] name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”*

Remission is the Old English word for “forgiveness” and the only way Cornelius or anyone else can be forgiven is by quote “believing on Christ.”

And, for those of you who’ve read ahead into Acts 11, you know that Cornelius gives this personal testimony; Acts 11:13 *“And he [Cornelius] shewed us how he [Cornelius] had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, [Cornelius] Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; (14) Who shall tell thee [Cornelius] words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be* ***saved****.”*

So, yes, there are those who teach that Cornelius didn’t need to be saved because he’d done so many good deeds. But, what does your Bible teach?

It teaches that good people need to be saved as well as bad people. And, by the way, like you, I’ve met people who think they’re too bad to be saved because they’ve done things they are very ashamed of. But consider the man Saul, who did all he could the thwart the work of the Church. And, wasn’t he saved?

Saul, then, must be our example of someone who is bad can be saved. But Cornelius is your example of someone who is quote good, and good people can be saved. There are more people around you like Cornelius than like the Apostle Paul. And they have done a lot of good things. But they, just like Cornelius, need to hear the Gospel from you or me and be saved.

Well, folks, it’s always a good idea to use the Bible to interpret the Bible. Look with me at the last line of Peter’s sermon to Cornelius and his friends. It’s in verse forty-three. Acts 10:43*“To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”*

Peter tells Cornelius that God is not partial and doesn’t show favoritism to anyone.

Peter tells Cornelius that there are many people who fear God.

Peter then tells Cornelius that God preaches peace through Jesus Christ. Acts 10:36 “*The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)”*

And Peter tells Cornelius that Jesus was raised from the dead; verse forty. Acts 10:40 “*Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; (41) Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.”*

And Peter tells Cornelius that Jesus would be his Judge. Acts 10:42*“And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.”*

What’s really so wonderful about this is this. You know people right now that need this very same message. In just a few paragraphs, a few sentences, Peter lets Cornelius know Who God is, Who Christ is, what Christ has done and why Christ had to die.

And as Peter preaches that day, the Holy Spirit uses his words to, not only bring Cornelius and his family and friends to the LORD; but, as you see later in the passage, they are all baptized.

Now, a word for those who think they are good and don’t need the LORD. A while back I met a man who, after I gave him the simple Gospel, told me he didn’t need my prayers and that he didn’t really need the LORD. He thought he was quote “good enough.” What would you say to someone who doesn’t think he or she’s so bad?

Would you look with me at the very same scenario and Jesus is preaching? Turn with me to the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Luke. Luke 5:27 *“And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, follow me. (28) And he left all, rose up, and followed him. (29) And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them.*

*(30)* *But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? (31)* *And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. (32) I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”*

Haven’t you found that the ones who are often the most difficult to reach with the message of the Gospel are those who don’t see themselves as so bad. Levi was a publican and Levi had many publican friends.

And just one word about Publicans. Publican is an Old English term for “tax collector.” The Romans were known for levying lots of taxes against its citizens. But they especially taxed the Jews. And in order to get the most they could from the Jews, the Romans would hire Jews to collect from the Jews: income taxes, crop taxes, property tax, emergency tax, sales tax, etc. These taxmen were known as publicans.

Levi was a publican. And the publicans were hated by both groups; both by the Romans and by the Jews. The Romans didn’t like them because the only reason for their existence was to bring Rome money. And a publican would often collect the taxes and completely skip town and keep the money for himself.

And the Jews hated them because they usually cheated them by over-charging. We’d call that today extortion. A publican, for example, could walk up to you and charge you a tax just because of what you are carrying. So, in the larger scheme of things, the publicans were the worst of the worst.

And, by the way, the Jews later designated Jesus a friend of these very same people. Luke 7:34 *“The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!”*

But who was it that complained when the publicans showed up at Levi’s house for a meal? And what did these men say to Jesus about eating and drinking in the homes of publicans?

Look again at verse thirty. Luke 5:30*“But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?”*

Here’s the LORD’s answer; verse thirty-two. Luke 5:32 *“I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”*

How many people do you know see themselves as righteous and without any need for God or Christ or salvation? There are plenty in Old Saybrook and in our surrounding area.

Yet, the truth of it all is this. Those who see themselves as better than others are just like a sick man who doesn’t think he needs a doctor.

Jesus or you and I can’t do much to help them. Why? Because it’s only those who see they really do have a need for God’s forgiveness that will ever benefit from the work of Christ. Jesus died for the world and yet how many are there in this world who won’t be saved simply because they quote “think they are OK.”

The Pharisees, remember, were men who spent their days studying the OT. They learned the interpretations of the Rabbis. They knew what Moses said.

Yet, they never could see what David taught about them. Psalm 14:2 *“The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. (3) They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”*

In truth, folks, there is none righteous. There is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

They never read or understood what Isaiah taught. Isaiah 64:6 *“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”*

If you’re good, good. But, like the Pharisees, you don’t think you need the LORD. You might think you’re better than other people. But the only ones who will be saved will be those people who, acknowledge their need of a Savior.

The only Savior known to man is the LORD Jesus Christ. He came to this world and became sin and was crucified and thereby took our sin’s penalty and punishment on the Cross that day.

And why? So that today, when you recognize that every good person is indeed a sinner, and you see that Christ died for your sins because God fully and completely loves you, that you too can, like Cornelius be saved, please offer this simple prayer to the LORD.*“LORD, I admit that I am a sinner and deserve Your judgment for my sins. I believe that Jesus died in my place on the Cross. Please save me today. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”*

Shall we pray? Hymn # 528 “My Faith Has Found A Resting Place”