

“A CRY FOR HELP”
Luke 7:1-10, Hebrews 6:10-12, Acts 10:1-23a
September 28 & 29, 2024

In the summer of 1980, I attended a Navigator’s training program in Indianapolis, Indiana. I had just graduated from college and that summer program was intended to continue my faith journey as a disciple of Jesus Christ. During that time we all had to find employment, so I acquired a job as a carpenter, helping to build a house just outside of what the city limits were at that time. I worked during the days of the week, and then receive training in the evenings and during the weekends.

One of the goals for that training program was to help us to become what they called FATCATS. This involved my learning to become a Faithful, Available, Teachable, Christian After Training. As a part of that training I learned to develop a Time Alone with God (a quiet time), reading and probing the Scriptures in order to help others do the same. I learned what God was desiring for my life, and I longed for a deeper faith in Jesus. I learned how to share my faith with another so that they could hear the Gospel message. I learned the importance of trusting others so that we could work together to build the Kingdom of God here in our world today.

Jesus calls each one of us to be FATCATs. As a FATCAT, we are first to be a Faithful follower of Jesus Christ, devoted to following only Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Matt. 22:37-38). We are to obey the teachings of the Bible, and follow all the commands of God’s Word. We are to put our hope in Christ alone, and not depend upon our own understanding (Prov. 3:5-6). We are to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:39-40), whether that be an enemy or a friend, family or foreigner. We are to live like Jesus.

Then, we are to be Available, ready to go wherever we are called to go for the purpose of spreading the Gospel Message to others. It’s not to be about our own desires, but to be willing to

obey the guiding of God's Holy Spirit to reach out to those who are in need or who are desiring a closer walk with the Lord Jesus. We are to put our own desires aside, and to comply with God's direction in our life so that we might be His servants, ready and willing to be used by Him for His purpose.

And then, we are to be Teachable, ready to hear the truth of God's Word and to follow it. That means that we are open to hearing God's corrections in our life, and becoming disciplined under His Word so that our lives conform to His will and His way (2 Timothy 3:16). We must always be ready to hear the Truth, and become willing to apply that Truth in our lives, even if we had previously been taught something else. God's Word is Truth, and He is the Author of Salvation.

And finally, we are to be Christians After Training. We cannot follow the Lord Jesus without the proper training in our lives. If we are to be called "Little Christs," that's what Christian means, we must learn who Jesus is and then model our lives after Him. While the training may happen throughout our whole lives, we must act upon the training we receive so that we may be disciples of Jesus and then go out and make disciples of Jesus.

Faithful, Available, Teachable Christians After Training don't just sit back and let others do the work of the Lord. Since we are all called to be FATCATS, that means we are all called to be active in our faith, active in our witness, and active in our worship of the Lord Jesus, no matter where we are, no matter who we are around, and no matter what we might be asked to do.

That's the importance of our lesson today from the book of Acts, chapter 10, verses 1-23a. Listen to this dynamic witness of a FATCAT in action. (Read Acts 10:1-23a)

Peter had undergone his training at Jesus Christ University for three and a half years. He had seen Jesus at work. He had learned the love of Jesus. He had experienced forgiveness and

correction first hand, and he had seen Jesus bring correction to the religious and secular leaders. Peter had learned how to share the Good News of Jesus with those in towns and communities throughout Judea when Jesus had sent them out in pairs. He had come to see the miraculous works of Jesus, and had been moved to remain a follower of Jesus. After Jesus' commission of the disciples, Peter stepped forth as one of the leaders of the new Church and boldly proclaimed that Jesus is the Messiah, both to the church leaders and to the common people. He had become a FATCAT.

But during his journey to the cities of Lydda and Joppa, Peter is again called beyond his comfort zone. Servants of a Roman Centurion living in Caesarea had come asking him to go with them to speak with their master. But Cornelius was a Gentile! Although the followers of Jesus had been reaching out to Gentiles in other areas of Judea, Peter had only been going to the Jews with the message of Jesus. Now he was being asked to go into the house of a Gentile and tell him about Jesus. But this was not without preparation or without divine intervention.

Cornelius had seen a vision and had been commended for his faithful living. *“He and his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly”* (Acts 10:2). This wasn't some pagan barbarian warrior that Peter was to go see. This was a God-fearing man, possibly the very one who had had his servant healed by Jesus as we heard in Luke 7:1-10.

As you heard, the centurion then, had invited Jesus to come heal his servant, but as He approached the house, the centurion sent notice that He understood the power that Jesus had, and that he was not worthy to receive Jesus into his own house. He understood authority, so this centurion trusted that all Jesus needed to do was to say the command and the servant would be healed. And Jesus had said to all the crowd following Him, *“I tell you, I have not found such*

great faith even in Israel” (Luke 7:9). And, as the centurion had put his faith in Jesus, the servant was healed. That sounds a great deal like the centurion that the angel of God visited in Caesarea. A God-fearing man who prayed regularly.

The angel knew Cornelius’ faith, and God desired to reach out to him and his family so that they could hear the full message of Jesus and become disciples of Jesus. It’s God’s desire to reach the least, the last, and the lost of this world so that all people might find Salvation through Jesus. So that precipitated the calling of Simon Peter.

Whether or not Cornelius knew it, this was a cry for help - help understanding more deeply the things of God so that acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah could be achieved and salvation for them would be accomplished. It was another case of God’s prodding the followers of Jesus to go out beyond the Jews to also reach the Gentile believers.

Folks, God is calling each one of us to do that very same thing - go beyond our own people to reach out to the least, the last and the lost so that they can hear the Good News of Jesus Christ. Some of you are doing that and are finding that there are so many who are crying out for help. They may be facing jail time. They may be facing physical impairments. They may be experiencing relationship issues. They may be facing homelessness. So many things inflicting people today causing them to cry out for help.

But the question for us is are we willing to go to them? After all they aren’t like us. They might try to take advantage of us. They might reject us. They might treat us harshly. Yes, that is the case, but if you are a Faithful, Available, Teachable Christian After Training, you’ll listen to God’s call in your life and you’ll obey the command to go to them so that they can hear the Saving Message of Jesus Christ.

Well, that’s where Peter came into the picture. The very next day, the Holy Spirit of God

convinces Peter that the message of Salvation is for all people, not just the Jews any more. Peter's vision of the sheet holding ALL kinds of animals calls him to reconsider the Jewish prohibition of going into the home of a Gentile to eat with them. The message he received was that it was no longer against God's rules to eat any animal. As Jews, they were forbidden to eat "unclean animals." God had given those guidelines to Moses millennia before, and the Jews were very strict about abiding by those guidelines.

And here, Peter was presented with every kind of animal with the command, "*Get up, Peter. Kill and eat*" (Acts 10:13). This was something completely contrary to the Laws and Commands of Moses. Why would this command come to him? Why would he be told to do something completely opposite of what had been handed down to them from long ago?

You see, God uses every opportunity to get us to consider being His servants. Peter had been praying in the middle of the day and was hungry. It was unusual for Jews to eat mid-day, since they typically ate mid-morning and mid-afternoon. So when Peter's hunger piqued his attention at noon, it would have taken a bit to get something for him to eat. It is right at that time, while he is hungry that God speaks to him.

We might compare that with what Satan did to Jesus after He had been in the wilderness fasting for 40 days directly following His baptism. He was hungry, so Satan had told Jesus, "*If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread*" (Matthew 4:3). We are vulnerable to temptation after we have been fasting for so long. It was a test to have Jesus prove to Satan that He was the Son of God. But Jesus had told him, "*It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'*" (Matt. 4:4).

Simon Peter may have thought that this was likewise a test from Satan. After all, he was also hungry, and all these good looking animals were presented to him to "*kill and eat.*" Why

wait until the servants bring him something from the kitchen? Why not eat right away? So Peter's response is admirably staunch, "*Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.*" (Acts 10:14).

You've probably come upon a situation like that. You're traveling in a foreign country and the pre-trip instructions are "Don't eat uncooked foods; don't drink the water; and don't forget to check the bed before you get into it." The instructions are given to us to keep us safe. The water is not always clean like what we have here in the U.S. Fruits and vegetables may be washed, but they are washed with the water that might have water-borne diseases in it. And many times the beds we are provided may not be empty when we get into them - many little creatures like human companions with them in the bed at night. So the guidelines are all for our own protection.

That is the same with the food restrictions for the Jews. Many animals were labeled as unclean because they carried parasites that wreak havoc in the human body. The animal may have been butchered well, but without refrigeration or preservation of any kind, the meat could easily have become harmful if not prepared right or left too long. And besides, God had provided certain animals for the people of Israel to eat from. So "wild game" was out of the picture. And yet, God calls Peter to "*Get up. Kill and eat.*"

As I was prepared to travel to other countries, I was advised to eat whatever was put in front of me. In many cases the people sacrificed a great deal to make sure I had the best food available. Russian families put on a big spread for us, and it could have even been cost-prohibitive for them to do that. But because we were their guests, the best was presented to us. And some of it was delicious, and some of it turned my intestines up-side-down. But we were to participate in the meal with them. They would have enjoyed it, too, since it may have been a

once a year event, or even once in a lifetime feast. No questions asked, we were told to receive it and eat with them as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

But the explanation comes quickly to Peter. The Holy Spirit spoke three times to Peter telling him, “*Do not call anything impure that God has made clean*” (Acts 10:15). What - God had now made it acceptable to eat lizards and snakes? It was now ok to eat pork? We could eat eagles and condors and pigeons and seagulls? It was ok to delight in bears, and skunks, and walruses, and porcupines, and hippopotamuses? And what about giraffes and gerbils? Yep! God had now called them all clean. So Peter had to decide whether he would be faithful AND available to go with the men and eat whatever was put before him in the home of a Gentile family. Who knows what he might get served - fresh crocodile stew? Or elephant steak?

But God was helping Peter to go beyond just the food part of it, to see the Gentiles as being worthy of having the Salvation of the world, too. For it was right then that the men arrived and begin asking for “*Simon who is known as Peter*” (Acts 10:18).

And then, the Holy Spirit speaks right to Peter again, “*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*” (Acts 10:20). This wasn't a happenstance, but rather a divine direction given not only to Cornelius, but to Peter as well. So after the explanation from Cornelius' servants, Peter invited the men into the house.

Now remember, this was the home of Simon the tanner. It was unusual for a guest in a Jewish house to invite other guests into the house, especially since it wasn't his house. But Simon the tanner must have been let in on the working of God, and had a hospitable attitude, for the men stay overnight and return home the next day. Think of the razzing that Simon the tanner would have gotten for hosting Gentiles in his home! Jews are gracious people, but not normally

to foreign Gentiles. I could be wrong, but I'm pretty sure this was a very awkward moment. Yet as Christians, they opened up their home for the travelers for the evening, and there was probably some amazing conversation that took place. Remember, God was working in the middle of it.

Faithful, available, teachable Christians after training understood the situation, saw the work of the Lord in it, and obediently responded to God's call. And thus they continued the evangelization of the Gentiles for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Folks, the cry for help is being lifted loudly and clearly all around us, if only we have ears to hear, and eyes to see. So many people whom we would count as objectionable and off limits are coming to the point of needing to hear the Salvation message of the Lord Jesus in their lives. Just like God took away the dividing standards for Peter so that he could go to the Gentiles in Caesarea, so God is also inviting us to be faithful in following His call, available to go where He is calling us, teachable to learn more about those around us, so that we might be the disciples of Jesus Christ in our own world, starting right here in Sheboygan.

Will you be a FATCAT, faithfully making yourself available for God to teach you about the needs of those around you so that you can tell them about Jesus? Are you living for Jesus as His disciple? I pray it is so, for the fields are ripe for harvest (John 4:5), but the laborers are few (Matthew 9:37). FATCATS are so needed to meet the cries for help in our world today.

Let's pray. Father, You have called each one of us to be a follower of Jesus. But many of us are just Christians in name only, never living our faith, never telling another person about Jesus. Forgive us, Lord! Give us the courage to become faithful, available, teachable Christians after training, so that the whole world might know that Jesus is our Savior, the Messiah, the One who seeks and saves the lost (Luke 19:10). Guide our hearts and minds to hear Your call for us and then obediently follow that call, to the glory of Your Name, Jesus. AMEN.