

# God is Already at Work...

## Evangelism Sermon

By Mark Snowden



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*This sermon was developed for use with “The Macedonia Project,” a five year plan to mobilize healthy churches from across Missouri and have them “come over and help” churches in Kansas City and St. Louis metropolitan areas. It is done in collaboration with the GPS 2016-20 emphases on Personal Evangelization and Starting Something.*

### **Introduction: Scripture: Acts 10:1-48**

Maybe you’ve noticed entertaining photos circulate on the Internet. A favorite is the tongue and cheek photos under the heading, “You only had one job.” There’s a photo of painted line on a road that goes around a dead squirrel. There’s plenty of misspelled tattoos. There’s one of a ceiling-mounted video projector inside the radius of a ceiling fan. And a favorite was an elaborate slide at a swimming pool that stopped three feet short of the water. Ouch. One day we’ll stand before Jesus. And He will say, “Believer, you only had one job: make disciples. So, how’d it go?” Double ouch.

After Jesus ascended to heaven after His resurrection, the disciples stayed among their own people group, the Jews. Simon Peter, one of the Twelve, traveled some in Judea among the Jews. But God had a different plan. Missions leaders like to say, “It is not the church of God that has a mission in the world, but the God of mission who has a church in the world.”<sup>1</sup>

Do you believe God is at work in our world? And, if so, then do you believe that God could *already* be at work? This sermon will help you understand three ways that God is already at work.

#### **1. ... Through Non-Christians (Acts 10:3-4)**

Exploration: Cornelius was the enemy; a military leader in the occupying force. But, he loved God, did nice things for the Jews, and he prayed constantly. His faith wasn’t his alone to hide, but his entire household followed his lead.

Interpretation: How many non-Christians do you know that are encountering visits from angels? As Cornelius was praying, God sent one His holy messengers on a visit. Did

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Dearborn, *Beyond duty: A passion for Christ, a heart for mission* (MARC 1997), p. 2.

he share the Gospel? He certainly could have! But instead he told Cornelius how to find Peter.

**Application:** In the early 1990s, the only way to get to the Kurds in northern Iraq was through the Islamic Republic of Iran. Evangelism teams were loaded on trucks and taken overland and let out at the border. They were also accompanied by a government religious “minder” who had the authority to imprison anyone caught evangelizing in Iran. One team’s truck broke down. When they coasted to a stop, a man sitting by the road came over and asked the minder, “Is someone from America with you?” The minder said to the American, “A citizen of our country has asked for you.” When the American hopped out, the man asked, “Would you kindly tell me the truth about Jesus?” The minder gave his permission and so the American shared the Good News of Jesus. The Iranian man said, “Now that Jesus is my savior and I know the truth, I will go tell my village.” As he started to walk off, the American asked with the minder interpreting, “How did you happen to be by the roadside today?” The Iranian man turned and said, “Jesus appeared in a dream to me last night. He said if I would wait by the road, he’d send someone to tell me the truth about him.” When the American heard this, he told the minder, “If this is what I think it is, our truck will now start.” The minder had everyone pile into the truck. It started right up and the team went on down the highway. God was already at work to arrange a divine appointment!

## **2. ... To Prepare You (Acts 10:13-14)**

**Exploration:** Simon Peter was staying in the home of Simon who was a tanner. Tanners killed all kinds of animals and stripped their hides. Tanners made tools, clothing, belts, sandals, straps, bags, and luggage for daily use. Because of handling dead animals all day, tanners were typically considered ceremonially unclean. Few participated in synagogue life and lived outside of the town. This all happened at Joppa, which is a smallish town on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It’s remote. Peter was traveling. Finding him would, well, take a miracle.

Peter went up on a rooftop and prayed while a meal was prepared. God provided a vision for him on that rooftop that challenged him as a Jew. God was at work! Peter had been well-trained all his life to avoid certain foods that were forbidden from the days of Moses. The message was pushing him far beyond his “comfort zone.” And it happened not just once so that he could dismiss it. The voice commanded him to eat three times before that vision of a giant sheet was taken back up to heaven.

**Interpretation:** God got Peter’s attention. Someone once described a vision as “Hope with a blueprint.” Then God began changing Peter’s heart. No longer was he to be bound by Jewish regulations and require it of all converts, but God was beginning to show Him

the different between culture and Gospel. If God was now making ritually unclean people clean in His eyes, Peter had better pay attention!

**Application:** How has God gotten your attention? A pastor showed up on a consultation with pen and paper in hand. He was ready to learn the latest evangelism training. He had visions of boxes and training kits. But the consultant said, “Church members need a role model and you’re it. Find a wingman, an assistant. Go out with him canvassing among those who visit your church and in the streets near your church, moving ever outward. After three months of sharing Christ door-to-door, then switch. Ask him to take the lead for three months and you assist him. After that six months is over you’ll both get new wingmen. Then every three months you’ll both assist them. Keep it going.” Two years later the pastor is known as a “soul-winner” and the church is growing by professions of faith and baptisms. What would it take for you to get after lostness?

### **3. ...Through the Gospel (Acts 10:42-43)**

**Exploration:** Peter’s sermon to Cornelius and his entire household was cut short by an amazing response. However, his message contained the truth. Jesus had commanded them to preach the Gospel to unsaved people and they were doing it! Peter and the believers with him were convinced that Jesus was the Judge appointed for the promised Judgement Day. His message to Cornelius and his household was through the Name of Jesus, everyone – even Roman warriors – who believed in Jesus would receive forgiveness for their sins. Jesus fulfilled centuries of prophesy. That sin-debt would be cancelled through Jesus.

**Interpretation:** The angel that appeared to Cornelius could have shared the Good News. However, God wanted to integrate Peter into His mission. Peter made the trek and encountered a household seeking a message from God! There was no waiting meal, no water, no polite washing feet, or rest for weary travelers. Cornelius and his household had assembled! Time was urgent! They had an interest that could not be squelched. Peter and the other believers would be taken care of after the preaching. But the Good News was waiting to unfold. That message took priority over everything else. God is at work through the Gospel!

**Application:** In some evangelism training classes, they pass out an Index Card. Participants are instructed to write “ME” in the middle of the card. Then they are to draw three circles around the card. On the line around “ME,” they are to write the names of everyone they have introduced to Jesus in the past six months. Then in the other rings, those that they led to Christ are to write the names of those they have led to Christ. If you had a card like that, what would it look like? Can those you lead to Jesus make disciples of others in their network?

**Closing:**

Bob Pierce, leader of World Vision and co-founder of Samaritan's Purse once said, "May my heart break with the things that break the heart of God." So, does your heart break for those who do not know Jesus? And if you don't know Jesus and are far from Him, does your heart break to know Jesus? Are you here today hungry for the Gospel? Has God been already at work in your life? Or have you ignored Him? Has God been training you, believer, to be obedient and share your faith? You only had one job!

God is at work. In fact, God is already at work!

**Invitation song:**

Coming Home (Never More to Roam)

## Small Group Study Guide

### "God is Already at Work"

**Bible Truth:** Followers of Jesus can trust that God is already at work in lost people, preparing us, and through the Gospel that we share with them.

**Issue:** We often assume we're starting from scratch whenever we share our faith.

**In Advance:**

1. Bring a pitcher of water and several cups to the meeting place. Put them on a nearby table. When you get started, explain that you have provided water for anyone that wants some. Revisit the water later in the lesson.
2. If your church is using the 15-day Devotions from the Macedonia Project ([www.mobaptist.org/macedonia](http://www.mobaptist.org/macedonia)), have them refer to Week 2, Day 4 for an explanation of the Romans 6:23 Gospel presentation. Be ready to discuss it in this lesson.

**Context:** Jesus had already been raised from the dead and ascended back to the Father. The disciples had been spreading the Good News of Jesus, but mainly to Jews. God was ready to get Simon Peter's attention. Is God able to get your attention, too? As the story is told or read, listen to it from Peter's perspective.

**Scripture:** Acts 10:1-48, particularly verses 3-4, 12-15, and 42-43 Read the entire passage through or tell it as an accurate Bible story.

**Study:** Engage everyone in discussion using these open-ended questions.

**Head** (facts):

- Encourage the group to tell the story section by section. Encourage them to not only learn the story, but to tell it to someone else in the coming week.

**Heart** (inspiration):

- Stop and pray for the Holy Spirit to provide a message to each person.
- Ask participants what they know about Cornelius and his entire household from this passage?
- Could the angel have told Cornelius the Good News? Instead, what was God's message to Cornelius? Why is that significant?
- Ask for three or four to share their conversion stories. How was God at work prior to your decision to follow Jesus?
- How was God at work in Peter's life? Ask for volunteers to share ways that God has gotten their attention. (*Allow time for responses.*)
- What is the Good News?
- Point to the water in the room prepared IN ADVANCE (see notes at top of lesson). Did anyone drink of it? Did anyone want to get a drink but was too embarrassed to get up or perhaps was told by someone else not to drink the water? How is that like the Gospel message?
- Introduce the Memory Verse – Point to Romans 6:23 as a simple Gospel presentation. If you're using the 15-day Devotions from the Macedonia Project ([www.mobaptist.org/macedonia](http://www.mobaptist.org/macedonia)), have them refer to Week 2, Day 4 for an explanation. Walk your class participants through the presentation. If not, there are a number of videos online that will teach you. Just search for "Bridge Presentation." Make sure it aligns with Romans 6:23.
- What is significant to you about Cornelius and his household (friends and family) all coming to faith in Christ simultaneously? Do you know an entire household that needs Jesus? Who is the most receptive person to approach first?

**Hands** (Application):

- Have you accepted the free gift of eternal life that God offers in Jesus? (*Offer to remain afterwards to discuss any decisions that were made.*)
- Who do you know that is far from Jesus? How many do you know that need Jesus? Make a list and pray over it daily! Do their families and friends need Jesus, too? Will you share the Good News of Jesus with them (individuals and groups) this week? What will you say to them? (*Romans 6:23*)
- Will you tell someone the Acts 10 story of Peter & Cornelius or Romans 6:23 this week? (*Track who volunteers and follow-up to help keep them accountable.*)

**Memory Verse:** "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23 NASB).