

The Lord Who Lifts

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Acts 10:34-43

Sermon Series:
God's Big Story

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Clara Null, a young mom, wrote this to Reader's Digest: "It was one of the worst days of my life—the washing machine broke down, the phone kept ringing, my head ached, the mail brought a bill I had no money to pay. Almost to the breaking point, I lifted my one-year-old into his highchair, leaned my head on his tray, and began to cry. Without a word, my son took the pacifier out of his mouth and stuck it in mine." Life has its ups and life has its downs and sometimes we just need someone to lift us up. As we continue God's Big Story, we are seeing the Lord who loves to lift his people

Last week, we learned the word that the people of God used when God called to them and sent them to serve, the Hebrew word *hinnainee*, which simply means, "Here I am." When God called Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, the maiden Mary and the man Ananias in Damascus, everyone of them replied, "*Hinnainee*- here I am," giving you and me a pattern for our own service to our Lord. When God calls you to serve, through His Word, through a conviction that arises in your heart, through the request of someone at your home or place of employment or in the church, you have the opportunity to say in your own heart, "*Hinnainee*, here I am – send me."

In the Book of Acts, we discover how the growing church broke geographical barriers as it spread outward from Jerusalem like a tsunami wave moves across the ocean with tremendous power and momentum. Jesus had said just before his ascension, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Today, in Acts chapter 10, we see the good news breaking the people barrier that existed between Jews and non-Jews as we meet two men, Cornelius, an officer of the Roman army and a gentile—a non-Jew, and the Apostle Peter, who was both a Jew and a Christian.

First, in the city of Caesarea, some sixty miles north of Jerusalem, we meet Cornelius at three o'clock in the afternoon in the middle of his workday. An angel appears and says, "Cornelius!" Understandably that was a scary moment, yet Cornelius has the presence of mind to reply, "What is it, Lord?" – in other words, "*Hinnainee* – here I am Lord!" The angel tells Cornelius to send some men to the city of Joppa and get a man named Simon who is called Peter. Cornelius picks three men, two servants and another devout soldier, and sends them on the two-day thirty-one mile trip to Joppa.

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The next day, as the three men are nearing Joppa, Peter is on the housetop to pray—to have a formal time of “*Hinnainee*—here I am, Lord.” Roofs of houses often were flat, and people used them the way we use back porches today. It was noon time, and while he was waiting for lunch to be prepared, Peter had the very unusual vision of a giant sheet being lowered by its four corners from the sky. A sheet upon which were many of the animals that Jewish law forbade them to eat. Peter is told to kill and eat and when he objects, the voice tells him what God has cleansed is no longer to be considered unholy. This happens three times, and Peter is perplexed, wondering what this means when, at that exact moment, the three men sent by Cornelius arrive at the gate, asking for Peter. Peter goes with them to Caesarea to meet Cornelius and discovers Cornelius has gathered a rather large crowd. God’s Big Story continues in Acts 10 and tells us what happened.

“³⁴Then Peter began to speak to them: [Peter recalls the vision of the sheet being lowered from the sky with animals the Jews viewed as unholy and the command of God to accept them as holy and realizes the similar conviction that the non-Jew was also unholy no longer was valid. ‘I truly understand that God shows no partiality,³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.’” And Peter then tells them God’s Big Story concerning Jesus: “³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of

Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:34-43). At that moment, as Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on the people who had gathered the very way the Spirit had come on the day of Pentecost and they were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. The people barrier was welcome. All peoples, including you and me, are welcome to come to Jesus and be loved by him.

Peter makes many enormous points in this story of Jesus. I want to just touch on two of them. First, Peter tells us how Jesus lifts our lives while we are living on this earth; and second, he speaks of the resurrection of Jesus. He tells of Jesus preaching peace, that Jesus anointed with the Holy Spirit and

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with power went about doing good and healing all oppressed by the devil and that if you believe in him your sin is forgiven. The Jesus who lifted people in the down moments of their lives when he walked this earth with the apostles is the Jesus who still walks among us and lifts us in the down moments of our lives. And our good Lord knows very well that you and I often need a lift.

Last week, I went jogging in and around Frying Pan Farm Park early in the morning. It was a spectacularly beautiful day with a blue sky, wispy clouds, a light mist rising off the pastures, seeing cattle, horses and sheep on the farm and deer, geese and a rabbit along the way. It was all great except for one thing. My body didn't want to run. It kept saying, "hinnai-no!" and I kept saying, "hinnai-go!" The memory came to mind of a friend whose grandfather knew the father of Eric Liddel, the fabulous sprinter who won the 400-meter race in the 1924 Olympics in Paris that was wonderfully portrayed in my favorite movie, *Chariots of Fire*. The family story is that as Eric was running in that race with his legs on fire as he tore around the track, he prayed a simple prayer, "Lord, you lift them up [my legs], I'll put them down!" I love that! I know in the midst of any challenge that our Lord is indeed the Lord who lifts and sustains his people and will see you through whatever you are going through.

Years ago, I remember my friend Ron Rand taught people

ways to share their faith with others and how to use the Bible to encourage people who are in a difficult place and in great need of the Lord who lifts his people. He had us look up the first letter of the Apostle Peter—I Peter chapter 5, beginning with verse 6 as expressed in the paraphrase of the *Bible* by Ken Taylor, known as the *Living Bible*. He said, "Read it and I will then ask you some questions." So I read verse six: "If you will humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, in His good time He will lift you up." Ron asked, "What are you asked to do?" I said, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God." To use the language of last week, to humble yourself is to say, "*Hinnainee* - Here I am, Lord, send me!" Then Ron asked, "If you humble yourself, what will God do?" I replied, "Lift you up!" "And when will God lift you up?" Ron asked. I said, "According to this verse, 'in His good time.'" In other words, in your down and humble moments, trust God. The next verse says, "Let Him have all your worries and cares, for He is always thinking about you and watching everything that concerns you." And Ron asked me, "How many worries are we to give Him, and how often does He think of you." Answer: all our worries and all the time! Ours is the Lord who lifts his people, and when you humble yourself, he will lift you up.

Some of us are experiencing what I have simply come to call "the pit" in life. The pit is an abyss in which you feel down or trapped. Perhaps it is because, in some way, you have yielded to some practice of

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your sinful self or become enmeshed in something that consumes your spirit. The pit can be a depressed spirit, an addiction from porn, booze, drugs or something else. The pit may be an illness, a traumatic relationship, a financial hardship. The wonderful Corrie ten Boom used to say, “There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still.” My friend Dave Eads once wrote about life in a pit. He said, “A person fell into a pit and couldn’t get out. A subjective person came along and said, ‘I feel for you.’ An objective person came along and said, ‘I knew someone would fall into that pit.’ A Christian Scientist said, ‘You only think you are in a pit.’ A Pharisee said, ‘Only bad people fall into a pit.’ A mathematician calculated the size of the pit. A geologist told the person to appreciate the rocks in the pit. A news reporter wrote the exclusive story of the pit. Buddha said your pit is a state of mind. A realist said, ‘Yup, that’s a pit.’ The IRS asked if taxes were being paid on the pit. The county inspector asked if the person had a permit for the pit. A self-pitying person said, ‘You haven’t seen anything until you’ve seen my pit.’ An elusive person came along and avoided the subject of the pit altogether.”

Dave concluded: “And Jesus saw the person in the pit, took the person by the hand and lifted that person out of the pit.” Ours is the Lord who lifts you up! “I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. ²He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the

mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. ³He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD” (Psalm 40: 1-3 NIV).

So, Peter makes it clear to Cornelius and those gathered with him that the Lord Jesus will stand with them and lift their lives by his power and presence among them, and then he affirms the reality of the resurrection of Jesus by saying, “They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.” Our God is the God who lifts. He is the God who lifted His Son to new life and He will lift you too. No matter what has happened in your life or is going on right now, our Lord invites you to come to him because he said, “Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die!” (John 11:26).

Guy Doud, an English teacher in Brainerd, Minnesota, was National Teacher of the Year some years ago (1986). I once heard Guy speak: “I remember one night in church, oh, I was all joyous, and all of a sudden God said to me, ‘I don’t want to hear your prayers any more until you go and talk to your own father.’ I said, ‘But he’s tough. I can’t talk to him about God, I can’t talk to him about You.’ He said, ‘You go talk to your father.’ [It was a *hinnainee* moment for Guy—a “here I am, Lord, send me” moment even though the

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task looked difficult. Guy said,] And I drove for thirty miles from Brainerd to Staples. I was trembling. I spent twenty minutes out in the car before I had enough courage to go inside. There sat my dad, smoking a cigar, watching television. I walked in and I turned the television off. I said ‘Dad, I’ve got to talk to you.’ ‘You in trouble?’ ‘No.’

“I sat down, and I talked to him about what I thought was the most important thing in life. I knew my mom had loved God, loved the Lord, and I said, ‘You know, it’s strange that a person that I should love the most, I feel the most uncomfortable talking with you, but I want to know.’ You see. My dad was tough. I said, ‘I want to know that your heart is right with God, and healed from all the bitterness in your life, I want to know I can share eternity with you.’ And he looked at me, and he reached over and he grabbed my hand—it was one of the most affectionate things he had ever done to me—and he always called me Sonny. He said, ‘Sonny, I have been too bad, God can’t forgive me.’ I said, ‘There is nothing that nobody’s done that God can’t forgive.’

“I just started talking to him—it was the first time I had really ever talked to my own dad about what I thought really mattered—not about how he was going to pay for tuition or this or that, but about something that really mattered. That night my father prayed with me to invite Jesus Christ into his life.... That was the most gorgeous experience—my dad changed. He shed

his tough old exterior. [Guy’s father experienced the Lord who lifts and loves his people and was a changed man.]

“I was chosen Brainerd teacher of the year and they were going to have a great big celebration for me on Wednesday. The Sunday before that Wednesday, my dad and my stepmother came to our house and I said, ‘Are you going to come to the reception on Wednesday?’ He said, ‘I wouldn’t miss it.’ And so he went to give me a hug as he was leaving on Sunday night and he kissed me right on the lips. And I remember when he started to kiss me I almost turned away my head. And he said, ‘I’ll see you Wednesday, Sonny.’ I said, ‘See you Wednesday, Dad.’ And the next morning the phone rang. Just like that—my dad had died of a heart attack.”

Gary said, “I went to the funeral home and Joel, the funeral director, said to me ‘Would you like to see him?’ ‘Yeah.’ I stood there and stared at my dad. Joel to me. ‘Anything you would like to tell your dad that you never told him?’ I said, ‘No, nothing I can think of.’ And oh, what a relief, what a relief. I was standing looking at the body and my brother came up. He was crying and he reached into his pocket and he pulled out an envelope that was quite thick. I said, ‘What’s that?’ He said, ‘Well, it’s a letter I wrote for Dad. You know, the last time I saw him, he tried to kiss me, and I turned away my head, and Joel suggested that I write down whatever I wanted to say to him and put it inside his coat pocket.’ So he lifted up his coat and he put in the letter and then

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next came up my sister. She had a 23-page letter. She stuck it in his coat pocket. She said, ‘Don’t you have a letter?’ I said, ‘No, I don’t have a letter. We’ll be together forever.’”

Jesus Christ is alive. He will lift your life today. He will lift your life tomorrow. He will lift you into heaven. Speak about it with your children. Talk of it with your parents. 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 (Romans 10:9). Our God shows no partiality. If you come to Jesus, he will come to you and lift you up.