

27b ACTS

We're ready to pick up our study now in Acts chapter 10, in verse 30, we left Peter inside the house with the rest of the unwashed, uncircumcised Gentiles, which was really an unheard of situation. And Cornelius in verse 30 says, four days ago I was fasting until this hour, and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God, send therefore to Joppa, and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner by the sea.

When he comes, he will come to you, and you will hear his voice, and you will hear his voice, and you will hear his voice, and you will hear his voice, and you will hear his voice, and you will hear his voice, and you will hear his voice, and you will hear his voice, and you will hear his voice, and you will hear his voice, and he will speak to you. Now notice, Cornelius, four days later, has total recall of what the Lord said. He only had to be called once, just said his name once, and four days later he remembers every part of what the angel spoke.

That's because he thought about it, and he meditated on it, and he made it the object of his faith, and he remembers it accurately. You know how sometimes people tend, especially if a supernatural occurrence were to take place, how it would swell and grow like a fish story? Oh behold, four days ago, ten angels appeared to me and said, Cornelius, you mighty man of valor, Cornelius, you righteous man, we've added up all of your alms and all of your mighty offerings, and behold, the mountain of your plenitude has ascended unto heaven before the throne of God, and God just couldn't help but come. You know, this is human nature.

We tend to embellish, we tend to gild and build and make things bigger than they are. But Cornelius says, look, four days ago, this is exactly what happened. And one of the things that's unique about the Bible, in religious literature, is that so many amazing and miraculous things are given in such a bald and unvarnished way.

It just says, and Jesus was walking on the water. There's no dramatic lights, there's no big build up, behold as he stepped, none of that. It just says, the disciples were out there trying to row across the lake, and they looked out and there was Jesus walking on the sea.

You say, wait a minute, walking on the sea? Where's your sense of drama? Couldn't you have built this up a little bit? But that's the nature of God's communication to us, is that it's not of human origin. And it isn't tainted with the kind of embellishments and accretions and exaggerations that you find in the apocryphal literature. If you want some

entertaining reading, get yourself a copy of the Apocrypha or the Pseudepigrapha.

Pseudo means, you know, not the real name. These are writings that are purported to be from someone and they're not. The Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Philip, the Gospel of Mary Magdalene, and some of these other wild-haired things that came around in the early days of the New Testament church.

You want to talk about some fantasy and some fantastic, exaggerated, it takes no time at all. You can't read half a chapter of that without saying, this has no claim to being Scripture. There's just night and day difference.

And sometimes you can come to a great appreciation of Scripture just by seeing everything that tried to be and isn't. But what I find interesting in this is what Cornelius says in verse 30. What do you think sticks out there? You all are getting good at being sharp-eyed and oriented to detail.

Cornelius says, four days ago I was fasting until this hour. Four days. How many days in human history? Seven.

You've got the seventh day, the Sabbath rest is the millennium. How long did the age of Israel last? In days. Four days.

Four thousand years. Going back, granted, Israel proper comes in at the Law of Moses, but basically the time of the patriarchs, you've got the four thousand years from Adam to Christ. And the Gentiles don't really come into play until after the four days.

That's when Christ comes. That is the pinnacle and the climax of human history is the coming of Christ. So this is no accident.

It's not two days, it's not six days, it's four days. Cornelius says, four days ago I was fasting, I was praying, but I got nothing but a promise. Four days ago.

I was praying, but I got a promise. Four thousand years before Christ, you have the promise in the Garden. Two thousand years before Christ, you have the promise to Abraham.

You will be a light to the Gentiles. But the Gentiles still have to wait. And after those four days, exactly, he says, at this same hour.

What does it mean, same hour? What time of day is he giving this little speech? Three PM. Ninth hour. On the dot.

He says, you know, it was exactly four days ago, right now, that I was fasting. I prayed in my house and a man stood before me in bright clothing. Your prayer has been heard.

Your alms were remembered in the sight of God. Send a joppa and call Simon. Simon

comes to testify and bear witness to this Gentile man after four days have passed.

Simon Peter and the rest of the apostles have been called by the Lord Jesus Christ to bear witness to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews after those four days have passed. And so there is an echo. There is a similitude here of the great program in human history.

Four days where the Gentiles wait. Then the apostolic testimony comes. Now the bulk of apostolic testimony to the Gentiles is going to come from the apostle Paul.

But the first break in the dam, the first light that the Gentiles see comes from Peter. Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost and preached. Peter sees the sheet let down, what God has called clean, let no man call common.

Peter comes to this centurion's house and takes off his sandals and accepts refreshment and sits down in the company of these formerly off-limits and verboten people. Send a joppa. Call Simon here, whose surname is Peter.

He is lodging in the house of Simon the Tanner by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you. So I sent to you immediately and you have done well to come.

Now therefore we are all present before God to hear all the things commanded you by God. How many Romans live in Caesarea? Hundreds, thousands. How many hear this good news from God through Peter? The ones who responded to the invitation to come.

Cornelius calls them up on the ancient Roman telephone system and says, Hey, come over to my house tomorrow. Oh, what have you got going on? Well, I am bringing a Jewish man down from Joppa. He is going to come and answer some of my questions.

Jewish man? What do I want to hear a Jewish man for? Is he a comedian? Is he an entertainer? Does he do something? No, he is going to talk about eternal things. He is going to talk about the one true God. Who do you think showed up at the invitation that Cornelius gave? These close friends and family.

They are the ones who are going to hear the word from God. All the rest of the Romans in the city, yes, the light is shining, but do they get it? Only if they choose to come. Only if they choose to hear.

Only if they choose to accept the word when it is preached. It is a series of decisions. There is an opportunity, but God doesn't force.

God did not pick Peter up like Ezekiel by the hair and transport him through the sky and drop him in the middle of Caesarea on a rooftop to broadcast the gospel to all comers. Did he? He makes a quiet trip in the company of a handful of men from Joppa to a specific place at a specific time to people who want to hear him. Who asked for him to

come.

Do not let someone browbeat you or run a guilt trip on you that as a Christian you are not doing enough to win the lost. That you ought to be running up and accosting people in public places. That you ought to be pressing tracts and brochures and pamphlets and books into their hands.

That you ought to be asking them about the status of their salvation and you ought to be broaching the subject when you sit next to them in public transportation or in other scenarios. That you have an obligation to go and insert yourself into other people's lives and other people's minds. There is no scripture.

That is a tradition. That is a belief. Widespread and completely unbiblical.

The Bible never... I defy anyone to show me a scripture that says, Thou shalt go invade the privacy of thy neighbor. Thou shalt beat down his door and make sure he gets saved. Thou shalt follow him in the highways and the byways and go into the hills and the valleys and compel him to come into the kingdom.

They'll quote the parable that Jesus told about the wedding feast where the king tells his servants go out into the highways and byways and compel them to come in. Well, who does he compel to come in? The sick, the lame, the blind? So what are you saying? That everybody is sick and lame and blind? What is the point of that parable? God will go to the outcasts. The sick and the lame and the blind were the untouchables.

They're like these Gentiles. And the point of that parable is the invited guests, the Jews, Israel, refused to come. The sick, the halt, and the blind represent the Jewish view of Gentiles.

And God says, I will go. Do you think you have to do much compelling to an untouchable, to an outcast, to an off-scouring who's not even normally let in anywhere and say, I'm having a huge wedding feast. There are tables laden with food.

There's entertainment. There's light. There's comfort.

There's rest. There's refreshment. How much compelling do you think it takes to go to a needy person like that? Do you think they had to drag them by the ear? Do you think they had to go out and press a tract into their hand and convince them to come? One thing about the lame and the blind, as an illustration, is there's no question of their need.

They don't argue their need. They're the first to admit, yes, I'm blind. Yes, I'm lame.

Yes, I'm deaf. They don't have any problem admitting that they have a need. The ones who said, oh, I need to go look at my new piece of land.

I need to try out my new cattle. I need to do this. I'm too busy to come.

They really have a need, but they don't admit it, do they? They're self-sufficient. I've got what I need, and it's over there. It's not in the wedding feast.

That's what that parable is about. Don't let someone distort it and twist it and beat you over the head with it and say you're not doing enough to win the lost. We don't do anything to win the lost except be available to speak the truth in love when God puts us next to someone who is asking.

Be ready always to give an answer when someone asks you a reason for your hope. And Peter says that in the context of suffering. People will see us and expect us to be miserable, and when we're not, they're going to wonder why.

Peter says, you know, you're going to endure a lot. And people are going to look at you and say, how come you're not crushed? How come you're not bowed down? How come you're not depressed? If I was in your shoes, I'd be so miserable I couldn't go on. Well, you seem to be cheerful.

You seem to have everything together. What's the deal? That's the question we're waiting for. That's the light of Christ shining through us that God is able to give us peace and give us joy that is independent of our circumstances, independent of our situation.

Be ready always to give an answer to anyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you. When you read that in its context over in Peter, it's the context of suffering. Things are not going well, but you're still hopeful.

People say, why is that? That's our entree. That's our opportunity. And we may not even have to say a word.

People will probably already know. If we're living as we should, they'll know we're believers. And they'll know the answer to the question before they even ask.

That Christianity really means something to them. Look at the strength. Look at the peace.

I wish I had peace like that. I wish I was secure in the knowledge of my future like that. I wish I had stability.

I wish I had understanding and had a basis for making my decisions and for choosing between things like this person or that person may have. That's what God gives us. It isn't anything of ours.

It's something that God puts in us. That is true biblical witnessing. And there is no substitute.

So, Cornelius, look at his attitude in verse 33. I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now, therefore, we are all present before God to hear all the things

commanded you by God.

There is the teachable man. He is a centurion. He is a well-to-do Roman citizen talking to a Galilean fisherman.

This is like the upper crust of Boston society talking to a Georgia cracker, saying, I've assembled all of my friends and all of my family to have you tell us what God says. I mean, you just can't hardly imagine in this culture and in this time how bizarrely upside down this is. The Romans wanted to parade around and tell these poor, backward, ignorant, peasant Jewish people all about civilization and about their conquests and their culture and their wisdom and knowledge that they got from the Phoenicians and the Greeks and everywhere else.

And instead, this man who has everything, immense power, immense wealth, immense influence, asks the fisherman, bows at the feet of the fisherman, says, we're all here assembled, me, my family, all my friends, you tell us what God has to say. That is a teachable attitude. Is Cornelius weak? Is he contemptible? Is he diminished in any way by this? Genuine humility does not diminish.

It doesn't take away your masculinity or your femininity. It doesn't diminish. It is an admirable quality because very few people have the mental strength to submit themselves when it's time to submit.

So notice verse 34. Well, even before we do that, before we get to what Peter says, notice in verse 30, four days ago I was fasting until this hour and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house. Behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing.

Is that what it said up above? What did it say up at the beginning of the chapter? Verse 3. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in. So what is our equation here? Angel of God equals man in bright clothing. Now, are angels men? Probably not.

So we want to take a look at, this is as good a time as any. We've seen angels as early as Acts chapter 1. We're going to see them throughout this book. But this is as good a time as any to stop for a moment and just take a quick survey of angels.

Remember a few years ago, angels became all the rage. Touched by an angel. Angel guy was a demon and he retracted his fangs and tried to be a good guy.

I never saw the program, but I saw the commercials. And all about angels. Angels in the outfield and angels on the football field and angels in movies and just angels everywhere.

Angel calendars, angel books, angel coffee cups, angel mouse pads, angel baseball caps, angel t-shirts. You couldn't swing a cat without hitting some kind of angel paraphernalia.

It's kind of died down now, thank goodness.

But there is a fascination and people still believe. There's something like 55 or 60% of all Americans, even people who don't claim to be Christians, believe in some sort of angels. Well, the word angel is sort of a misused term.

Angelos in Greek is the origin of this word. And it basically means messenger. It has come to be used for the order of supernatural or heavenly beings who live in God's realm.

God's invisible realm. Not all of them function as messengers. But we apply the term to them because we don't really have a convenient name.

We haven't been given a name for the race of heavenly beings. There are various terms in Scripture applied to them. They often function as messengers.

And so we have come to call all of them angels or angeloi. In fact, very few of them actually function as messengers from God to man. This is sort of like the word Kleenex.

There's all manner of facial tissue. Somebody says, Hey, can you hand me a Kleenex? Well, it may or may not actually be the brand. We use one word to just embrace the whole thing.

Or we say, Go down and get me a burger and a Coke. Well, it might actually be a Dr. Pepper or a Sprite or any one of a variety. Especially in Texas.

In Texas, anything that fizzes is a Coke. It doesn't matter. Hey, go down and get me a Coke.

And it's just any kind of a soft drink. Well, in the same way, we use angel loosely to refer to these heavenly beings. Some of the other terms that are used for them in the Old Testament, of course, you don't have Greek, you have Hebrew, and that's Malach.

M-A-L-A-C-H. You'll see this in the name of the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi literally means My Messenger or My Angel. They are also called B'nai Ha'Elohim.

You'll recognize Ben as the name for Son. And Elohim means God. So, Sons of God, B'nai Ha'Elohim, Sons of the God.

You find this, for example, in Genesis 6.2. The sons of God saw the daughters of men were beautiful. They took wives for themselves, whomever they chose. Again, in verse 4 of that chapter, Job 1.6, there was a day when the sons of God, B'nai Ha'Elohim, came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.

Satan, the devil, is, of course, a member of this order of beings. Job 2.1 and so on. They are also called B'nai Elim.

El, E-L, is a general term for God in Canaanite circles, going back to ancient times in the ancient Near East. Elohim is actually a sort of plural. It's a dual, technically.

There's two of something. But in Near Eastern thinking, it's sort of like the royal we, the we of majesty. When the queen says, we are not amused, and she's talking about herself, well, that idea, that to magnify something and make it great, you put it in the dual.

So, for example, the heavens, HaShemayim, it's talking about everything up over your head, and it's big, it's a vast expanse, so we make a dual out of it, Shemayim. The sea, Mayim. Anything that you want to magnify and make really big, you put this dual ending on, not anything, but a lot of things.

So Elohim is the sort of plural of majesty for the root word El. So sometimes you have B'nai Elim. This, for example, is found in Psalm 29.1. Ascribe to the Lord, O sons of the mighty, the New American Standard translates this, where really it would be sons of the gods.

Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. And basically, what they've decided is that in some ancient Near Eastern literature outside the Bible, something that is of Elohim just means it's really big. Like we say, well, and forgive me, this is not something we say, but people say something like, well, there was this god-awful storm.

Why would someone say that? They're trying to say how really big a storm it was. Because it was god-awful, people will say. Well, that's as close as I can get to getting you in the ancient Near Eastern mindset where someone would say there was a wind of God, a Ruach Ha'Elohim that came.

Now, the reason I give you this example is that occurs in the book of Jonah. The storm that strikes the boat when Jonah says, I'm going to Tarshish. I'm going to the town where Saul will be born someday instead of going to Nineveh.

And it says a Ruach Ha'Elohim was hurled into the water. Well, is this the spirit of God or is it a great mighty wind? Well, you have to make this determination in context and someday when we do Jonah, I'll give you the answer. But you see what I mean here.

A mighty thing is sometimes called a thing of God. And so you have to use some interpretation. So, is this sons of the mighty, the way the New American Standard translates it in Psalm 29.1, or is it sons of God, like B'nai Ha'Elohim, referring to the race or the order of supernatural beings? You have a similar idea in Psalm 89.6. Who in the skies is comparable to the Lord? Who among the sons of Elim is like the Lord? Well, who are we talking about here? This is essentially the same as B'nai Ha'Elohim.

It just doesn't have the plurality of majesty. It means the sons of the gods. Is it little g or big G? Well, read the rest of the Psalm.

Is he talking about idolatry in Canaan or is he talking about the heavenly realms? You have to determine it from context. So, one of the most interesting and perplexing passages in this regard is Psalm 8.5, talking about man. What is man that you are mindful of him or the son of man that you visit him? You have made him a little lower than Elim.

And the son of is not there. So how do you translate it? Well, some Bibles, like the Revised Version, say you have made him a little lower than God. Others say you have made him a little lower than the mighty or you have made him a little lower than the angels.

Which is it? You have made him a little lower than God? And then you've crowned him with glory and honor? Well, fortunately, in this case, it's quoted twice in the New Testament in Hebrews, where, of course, it's translated into Greek. And so what does it say in Hebrews 2.7 and 2.9? The author of Hebrews, I think the Apostle Paul, quotes it this way in Greek. You have made him, for a little while, a little lower than the angels.

So Paul understood it, or the author of Hebrews, understood it to mean angels. The Elim are the angels. And he puts it in that vocabulary in both verse 7 and verse 9 of Hebrews 2. These beings are also called holy ones.

Kadoshim. Kadosh Q-A-D-O-S-H. Kadosh.

Psalm 89.5, Psalm 89.7. The heavens will praise your wonders, O Lord, your faithfulness also in the assembly of the holy ones. Now this is interesting because several times in the Old Testament, these beings are said to be an assembly or a council. What does that tell us? There is order, there is hierarchy, and there is government.

I'll say that again. There is order, there is hierarchy, there is government in the civilization of the angels, the heavenly beings. Some of them outrank others.

Some of them sit in the council, and some of them don't. Some of them are captains in the armies of the hosts of the Lord. Others are the equivalent of foot soldiers.

What does that translate to in their part of the universe, their dimension? I don't know. That's the analogy that's given to us. They are also called... Now what have I given you so far? They are in the Old Testament malach, in the New Testament angelos, which means messenger in both cases.

They are sons of God. They are holy ones. And now the fifth term here is they are called watchers.

Daniel 4.13,17,23 Daniel says in Daniel 4.13, I was looking in the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, both terms used in the same verse, descended from heaven. No doubt that this is a non-human emissary. Daniel 4.17, This

sentence is by the decree of the watchers, and the decision is a command of the holy ones.

What did I just say? There is order, there is hierarchy, there is government amongst the angels. Some of them have the authority to issue commands and to issue decrees. Daniel tells us in 4.17, In order that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whom he wishes and sets over it even the lowliest of men.

Jesus will rephrase this, the last shall be first, the first shall be last. Do you feel like a lowly person now? If you are the meek, who will inherit the earth, Daniel 4.17 is for you. You may be one of the lowly that God will set over vast portions of real estate.

Daniel 4.23, The king saw a watcher, a holy one, descending from heaven and saying, Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump with its roots in the ground. A band of iron, this of course the tree represents Nebuchadnezzar. He is going to lose his mind, grow out his fingernails and his hair and eat grass and be a wild man for seven years.

This was by the decree of a watcher, a subordinate intermediary authority from this race of angelic creatures. They evidently have some say in when and where things take place in human history. God works through them to accomplish his purpose.

You see this all through the book of Revelation, right? Remember the ones that stand at the four corners of the earth and release the winds or who blight a third of the crops and a third of the water and all of that? It's done through intermediaries. Angels blow the trumpets and ride the horses and do a lot of things that take place in that apocalyptic revelation. So again, this sort of reminds me of the gentle Jesus syndrome where people think that Jesus is just sort of a weakling and he just kind of walks slowly through the daisies holding people hand by hand and then sitting down and putting a child on his knee and smiling and saying beatitudes and that kind of thing.

And they don't really understand that Jesus is also riding the white horse, his robe spattered with blood, sword flashing forth from his mouth, obliterating the enemies, ruling and shattering the peoples with a rod of iron like a clay vessel. And you know what this is like. I mean, it's a lot more dramatic than a pinata.

You get a clay vessel. You get a big iron bar. Smash the thing into a thousand pieces.

That is the picture of Jesus ruling in the millennium. It isn't the gentle Jesus picking daisies and distributing them hither and yon and smiling and warm. You know, Jesus is warm and loving, but he is also all about business and government and judgment.

He has eyes like a flame of fire and feet that shine like brass. Everywhere you look, there is a reflection of holy fire which represents judgment, and that is also the Lord Jesus.

Same with the angels.

People are all excited about the guardian angels and angels' watches over me and all of this. Well, the angels are also saying cut down the tree, chop it off, blight a third of the earth, blight the water supply, blight the sky, blight the crops, blight the animals, people crying out, let the rocks fall on me. This is at the angels' behest.

Other expressions include this idea of there being a group, a council, or a congregation. Again, this is Psalm 82 and Psalm 89. And then finally, when you find the phrase the God of hosts, the Lord God of hosts, Yahweh Sabaoth, often this host has the idea of the heavenly hosts, the armies that were revealed when Jeremiah prayed and asked that his servant have his eyes open.

And when he looks out on the hills, he sees the chariots and the horsemen of the angelic armies ranged about the perimeter there. I suspect that the flaming chariot that arrived to take Elijah heavenward was driven by one of these angelic army types. You don't have driverless chariots showing up.

Somebody's got to be at the wheel. Even on dart, they've got some sleepy person back there at the controls in case something goes wrong. So, the Sabaoth, the hosts.

In the New Testament, your word is almost always angelos. You have the heavenly host that joined the messenger that appeared with the angel that spoke to the shepherds. Suddenly, there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying.

They stood on the ground and they spoke. They didn't hang in the air and sing. They are called spirits in Hebrews 1.14. Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? Fascinating statement about the angels.

Are they not all ministering spirits? This means they have a job to do. They're not just watching. They're not just spectators.

They are ministering spirits. They are sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation. Anytime you see the word inherit, your eyes ought to perk up because not all believers inherit salvation.

The word inherit is a key term for the overcomers, for the narrow road walkers. You can see the kingdom and not inherit the kingdom. You can see life and not inherit life.

Jesus told the Pharisees, you will see many coming from the north, east, south, and west and sitting down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom. You will see it. They will be inheriting.

You will be cast out all the way through the New Testament. It's very key. Hebrews 1.14, the ministering spirits, who are they ministering for? Not any old Christian who goes down and buys an angel calendar.

Those who inherit. God will erect a wall of fire. God will provide supernatural protection, supernatural oversight, supernatural ministry for those who are inheriting salvation, inheriting deliverance.

Deliverance is their inheritance. It is their right because they have not sold it for a mess of pottage. They have not abrogated it and cashed it in so that they could go like the prodigal and spend it on riotous living.

Those who are faithful to the Father, those who are overcomers in the Revelation 2 and 3 sense, have ministering spirits detailed on their behalf for their sake. Hebrews 1.14 You remember in Colossians 1 and verse 16 when he's talking about we went through Colossians 1 we talked about everything that Christ has created and going through the range of His glories. It says, By Him all things were created both in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible.

Visible and invisible. Whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through Him and for Him. You know what this tells us? The angels are created beings.

Ephesians 6.12 Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against rulers, powers, forces of this darkness, spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenlies. These same creatures, the same order or class of created being. Colossians 2.15 When He, Jesus, had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them having triumphed over them through Him.

The Bible has a lot to say about the angelic hosts. Paul says in Romans 8.38 I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, or any other thing can separate us from the love of God. And he details these various categories of angelic being.

1 Corinthians 15.24 Then comes the end when He, Jesus, hands over the kingdom to the God and Father when He has abolished all rule, all authority, all power. 1 Thessalonians 4.16 The Lord Himself would descend from heaven with a shout with the voice of the Archangel. A-r-c-h-a-g-g-e-l-o-s Archangel.

Who is the Archangel? Jude 1.9 Michael, the Archangel. Well, there's a lot more we could say and need to say about angels. We're out of time for tonight.

But remember this. They, although they are superior to us in almost every way, are gladly subordinate and in a serving capacity on our behalf because they honor God. It is the same attitude amongst the unfallen angels that Cornelius demonstrates before

Peter, that Peter himself demonstrated before the Lord.

And it's the attitude that we want to cultivate and develop in our own lives. It is respect for authority, love expressed in a self-sacrificial way toward others that qualifies us for this ministry, that qualifies us for the inheritance of which these scriptures speak. Let's close in prayer.

Father, thank You for the wonderful and completely undeserved blessings and benefits that You bestow on us each and every day. We thank You for the opportunity to learn and to grow, to make progress and advance in Your plan and in Your purpose. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress these truths in our hearts, remind us of them so that we can meditate, we can digest them and see their applicability in our personal, individual situations and circumstances.

We know that in so doing, we will fulfill the calling that You have issued to us. We will abide in the vine and bear much fruit. We ask all these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.