

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

ACTS LESSON 3

The Gospel in Samaria (Acts 9-12)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4). Welcome to our study of the Book of Acts. This section is going to investigate Acts 9-12 as the Gospel goes into the region of Samaria. Remember that the Book of Acts is a book of conversions. It is the book in the New Testament that tells us how people became Christians then, and how we today can become Christians as well. So, this is a book about how to obey the Gospel and how to become a New Testament Christians. There are two conversions in this lesson upon which we will be focusing. The first, in Acts 9, is the conversion of Saul. We will go from Saul the persecutor to Paul the evangelist—the one who is spreading the message of the very One Whom he had at one time persecuted.

Saul's conversion is recorded for us in Acts 9, and is a wonderful example of the power of the Gospel even in its enemies' lives. Saul no doubt is an enemy of the Gospel of Christ. We learn first of all in Acts 9:1-2 that Saul was wreaking havoc against the church. He was persecuting and breathing threats against the family of God. Acts 9:1 tells us that Saul was breathing threats against the church and that he went to the elders and the high priest to ask that if he found any of “the Way,” whether men or women, that he might bind them and bring them to Jerusalem. Here we see Saul's horrible life and his horrible actions against the church. This is why he no doubt said in 1 Timothy 1:15-18 that he was the chief of sinners, injurious, a blasphemer, and harmful to the cause of Christ. Yet this man, who was wreaking so much havoc on the church, was about to be confronted with a great light. Saul goes from breathing threats against the church to being confronted with the light of Jesus Christ. He is traveling down the road toward Damascus when suddenly a great light shone around him. Saul heard a voice saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Here, Saul is presented with Jesus face to face as that great light shone all around him. He is presented with the truth of the Gospel in this revelation as well. To really be converted, a person must truly change from his or her past life and must be confronted with Jesus. There is no conversion without confrontation—not in a bad sense, but in the sense that a person must be confronted with Who Jesus really is, what He expects, and what can be learned about Him from the New Testament. Saul is confronted with Jesus and hears Christ's word. Romans 10:17 teaches us that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Yes, we have to hear what God has to say on the matter of salvation if we are going to be saved. The only way to hear properly is to hear the words of Christ as found within the New Testament. Do you remember the example in Matthew 17 where Peter, James, and John were on the mountain with Jesus? Jesus is transfigured before them. Elijah and Moses appear. But as soon as Peter blurts out, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah,” a voice came down from Heaven saying, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear him” (Mt. 17:1-5). So, in order to hear properly, we have to be confronted with the words of Christ. But notice something good about Saul as we see him in Acts 9. Notice his attitude, especially in Acts 9:6. Here, Saul is confronted with Jesus. Jesus asks him, “Saul, Saul, why

are you persecuting Me?” Saul asks, “Who are You, Lord?” Jesus says, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.” Then, Acts 9:6 indicates that Saul, “trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’” The Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” Although Saul had been persecuting Jesus, and had been wreaking havoc on the church, when he was confronted with Christ, he did have the right attitude. It would have been hard not to, as the light shone around him and as he was blinded. Saul was in a situation where he had to hear what God had to say. But he did receive Christ’s words with a good attitude. He asked simply, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” That is one of the great questions in the New Testament. We could all ask the same question of ourselves: ‘Lord, what do You want me to do? How do you want me to respond to Your word? What is it that You have for me to achieve in this life? How should I become a Christian? What must I do as a Christian, once I have obeyed the Gospel?’ These are very practical questions. “Lord, what do You want me to do?” God wants each of us to obey His will. Matthew 7:21 records, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” We must **do** the will of the Father. The Lord wants us to obey His will, to listen to His Word, and to be faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10).

Saul is told, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” In Acts 9:7-9, we see how Saul’s companions lead him by the hand into the city because he had been blinded by the light he had seen. Once in the city, Acts 9:11 tells us that Saul was praying and fasting. God then spoke to His servant, Ananias. In Acts 9:10-19, God tells Ananias to go into the city to the street called Straight and preach to Saul. Ananias’ response is basically, “Wait a minute! I’ve heard about Saul. Isn’t he the one who is doing so much harm to the cause of Christ? Isn’t he the one who is persecuting Christians?” The Lord tells him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.” Ananias heeds God’s word. He goes to Saul and preaches the Gospel to him.

As we think about Saul’s conversion, we need to think about one very important point. From the life and conversion of Saul we learn very clearly that a sinner’s prayer will not save anyone. As we read through the New Testament, there is only one time where we find a sinner praying in regard to salvation, and it was not the prayer that saved him. Notice what Acts 9:11 says. Here, we learn about Saul as he is waiting on Ananias, who is told, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.” Saul had been fasting, and he had been praying. If there was ever a man who prayed many a sinner’s prayer, you can rest assured that it was Saul of Tarsus. But did those prayers save him? No. The sinner’s prayer is not what saves a person. Many popular religious people today go on television or the radio, and at the conclusion of their programs they will say something like this: “If you believe in Jesus, come down to the front, say the sinner’s prayer, accept Jesus in your heart, and you will be saved.” Then they tell the person to say something like, “Dear Jesus, I believe that You are the Son of God. Come into my heart and save my soul.” There are two things that we need to notice here. First, that kind of prayer is never found in the Bible. Second, in the Book of Acts (the book of conversions), you will never find anyone being told to say the sinner’s prayer to be saved. The only sinner’s prayer you find in the Book of Acts (the book of conversions) is Saul’s, and his prayer did **not** save him.

What was it that Saul had to do to be saved? Saul (as the apostle Paul) recounts this in Acts 22. Ananias came to Saul, and we learn exactly what Saul had to do. The Lord had told Saul to go into the city, where he would be told what he **must** do. What was that

“must” regarding what Saul had to do to be saved? What did God require of him in order to receive salvation? Let’s turn our attention to the words of Ananias as recorded in Acts 22:16. Ananias said to Saul regarding salvation, “Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Saul believed on Jesus. He had heard His voice and had even called Him “Lord.” No doubt he was ready to make changes in his life (repent). He no doubt had confessed Jesus as the Son of God. But even though he had been praying, **Saul still had to do something**. Saul had to get up and obey God by being baptized in water in order to wash away his sins. I am not saying, of course, that there is anything mystical or magical in the water itself. It is not the water that necessarily has anything mystical or magical in it. Rather, it is obedience to the commands of God that saves us. Peter said in 1 Peter 3:21 that it is “not the removal of the filth of the flesh” that save us, “but the answer of a good conscience toward God.” He also says, “baptism does also now save us.” We do not wash sin off our bodies. But when God tells us to do something, and we respond with a good conscience and obey Him, then we have done what God expects of us. So how did Saul “call on the name of the Lord”? How was Saul saved? At what point were his sins washed away? In Acts 22:16, it is clear that Saul’s sins were washed away at the point of baptism. Why is that? It is because it is at the point of baptism that we contact the blood of Jesus. Jesus’ blood is what saves us (Mt. 26:28). Romans 6:1-4 teaches us that we reenact the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus by dying to sin, being buried in water, and rising up out of the water to walk in newness of life. Just as Jesus died, so we die to sin. Just as He was buried, so we, too, are buried (in water). And it is at that point that we contact the blood of Christ and that we rise up out of the water—no longer the “old man,” but a “new man” who is ready to walk in newness of life. This, then, provides us with intimate details about the conversion of Saul.

Once Saul was converted, the text tells us, he then began to preach the Gospel. He is a great encouragement to all of us. Just days before, he had been teaching against Jesus, and he had been taking Christians (those of “the Way”) to prison. But he heard and obeyed the Gospel, and immediately went out **doing** what, just days earlier, he had been **condemning**. This man truly was converted to the Gospel. Oh, how we need people like this today. When he heard the Gospel, he obeyed it. Then, he literally spent the remainder of his life for Jesus. Every waking moment was about pleasing the Lord. Saul had wasted so much time in Judaism, and he had been so hard nosed against the Gospel, that he decided that he was going to live the rest of his life for Jesus. Isn’t that really the attitude that we all ought to have? All of us have, at one time or another, lived in sin. All of us have been selfish and foolish in our own lives. Yet when we obey the Gospel, and when we realize the gift of salvation, each of us ought to have the attitude that Saul had. He said, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). His attitude was, “My life no longer exists; now I am living for Jesus.” That is the attitude that every faithful child of God ought to have today.

As we move away from the conversion of Saul in Acts 9, we are introduced to the conversion of another individual. Acts 10 introduces us to a Roman soldier by the name of Cornelius. This man was a Gentile. Remember that the Gospel was to be preached to the Jews first, and then also to the Gentiles. In Acts 2, the Jews heard the Gospel. The doors of the church were opened, and Jews became Christians. In Acts 10, the doors of the kingdom are now going to be opened for the first recorded time to a Gentile who is not worshiping according to the Jewish religion. Thus, Cornelius becomes the first Gentile convert. Cornelius was a good man. The Bible says in Acts 10:1-4 that Cornelius was upright, that he gave alms generously to the poor, that he prayed to God always, and that his prayers went up as a memorial before God. But in this text, an angel comes to him and tells him that

someone is going to come to him to preach the Gospel message to him. God then sends an angel to Peter, and as a result of the vision that he experiences, he goes to Cornelius to preach the Gospel. There is a powerful lesson to be learned in Acts 10:1-4: good, moral people still need to hear the Gospel in order to be saved. Cornelius was a good man. He was upright, blameless, and one who gave alms to the poor. He was a benevolent man. He was one who prayed regularly. But he was a man who was lost. Good, moral people cannot be saved by their own goodness. We need to realize today that even the most upright people, if they have never obeyed the Gospel, are still lost. We need to realize that goodness, in and of itself, will not save us. Why is that? It is because **“all have sinned”** (Rom. 3:23). Isaiah 64:6 says that all of our righteousness, apart from God’s salvation, is like **“filthy rags.”** Luke 17:10 says, **“When you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’”** Without Jesus and His salvation, although we may do many good things, we still have the blight of sin upon us. And, we must do what God has said for us to do in order to be forgiven of our sins.

In Acts 10, we see how Peter had a vision. He is on a rooftop about noon, and a vision comes to him. In this vision, there is a large sheet laid open, containing all kinds of animals—creeping things and four-footed beasts. They are shown to Peter, and the angel in the vision says, **“Rise, kill and eat.”** But Peter says, **“No, not so Lord.”** This happens three times, and then the vision goes away. Peter is left wondering about this vision. And while he is pondering what has just happened, three men come from Cornelius. Peter then accompanies them to Cornelius. Eventually, it dawns on Peter that God was not talking about animals. Rather, God was showing him that whatever God has called **“clean,”** Peter should not be calling **“unclean.”** The Gentiles were called **“unclean”** by the Jews. The illustration of the vision, then, was not about animals or food, but was instead intended to convey the message that in God’s sight, all people are now amenable to the Gospel. Peter therefore needed to put away his bias and prejudice, and then go to preach the truth to Cornelius and his household. All men today need to hear the Gospel. Whether or not I like their lifestyles, whether or not I agree with their personal ideologies, whether or not I agree with their governmental systems, or whether or not I agree with their morality (or whether or not they agree with the Bible’s morality), we still must love them enough to take the Gospel to them. Thus, from this we learn that we cannot be prejudiced in sharing the Gospel. We cannot merely share the Gospel with those whom we like. All people today need to hear the Gospel. Listen to what Paul said in Colossians 1:28 about Christ: **“Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”** What was Paul’s attitude regarding those who needed to hear the Gospel? Every man, woman, and child needs to hear the Gospel. So, we cannot be prejudiced when we preach the message of Jesus Christ.

Peter (a Jew by birth, and a Christian) goes to Cornelius’ house. Cornelius has seen all of this in a vision, and is overwhelmed by the fact that Peter is coming to him to preach the Gospel. In Acts 10:25-26, Peter arrives, and Cornelius bows down to worship him. But Peter says, **“Stand up; I myself am also a man.”** Here is a Gentile who is overwhelmed by the fact that a Jewish Gospel preacher has come to him, and he bows down to worship him. But Peter said, **“No. Don’t do that. Stand up. I’m just a man, like you.”** From this text we learn a very important lesson—which strikes right at the heart of Catholicism. Catholicism claims that Peter was the first pope, and that a pope can receive the worship of men just as Peter did. But that is not true, and it is not what the Scriptures teach. The Bible tells us in Acts 10:25-26 that Peter refused to be worshiped (even by a Gentile who was not yet a convert). Thus, we learn that men are never to worship other men. We are not to worship angels (Heb. 1:5-12). We are not to worship other men (Acts 10:26). In fact, Jesus said in

Matthew 4:10, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve." **God** is the only One Whom we are to worship. But do you know what else is interesting about Peter allegedly being the first pope? In Matthew 8:14-15, who did Peter heal? It is interesting to learn that it was his mother-in-law. If Peter had a mother-in-law, then what else did he have? He also had a wife. Yet Catholicism claims that Peter was the first pope and that popes are celibate (meaning that they do not have wives). Yet Peter himself does not fit into that mold. Do you see the inconsistencies between what the New Testament teaches and what Catholicism teaches? You do not read of required celibacy in the New Testament. Such is never commanded. In fact, God teaches that marriage and the home are for all people (Gen. 2). And, men are not to forbid others to marry (1 Tim. 4:4-5). Thus, the teachings of Catholicism are in contradiction to what we read in the New Testament.

Peter then continues his message. Cornelius recounts what happened, explaining that four days ago he was fasting, and he had been told in a vision that Peter would be coming. Peter responds in Acts 10:34-35 by saying, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him." Here, we find a very relevant lesson. God is not prejudiced, and neither should we be. God is not concerned with our skin color or with whether we are male or female. God is not concerned with how much money we make. In matters of salvation, God is not concerned with our nationality. God is concerned about all people everywhere hearing the Gospel. How do we know that? In Mark 16:15 Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." God is not prejudiced, but loves all people. He wants all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). And we need to have that same attitude. Unfortunately, in times past we have been prejudiced against other people because of their skin color, their social status, or their wealth. But God does not think like that. We need to love all people equally. There is an old saying that is so very true: All men stand on level ground at the foot of the cross. This is true, because we have all sinned and because we all need the blood of Jesus to get to Heaven.

Peter preached that message. In Acts 10:34ff., he preached about Jesus and about salvation. Cornelius and his household heard the message, and the Holy Spirit came upon them (which is the baptism of the Holy Spirit for the Gentiles), and in Acts 10:47 Peter then said, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" He then commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (vs. 48). Just as in every account we see in the Book of Acts, Cornelius and his household were baptized. In Acts 2 people were baptized. In Acts 8 people were baptized. In Acts 9, Saul was baptized. In every account, people are baptized so that they can come into contact with the blood of Jesus. Baptism is essential to baptism. That is what the Scriptures teach.

Nicodemus had a good question. He came to the Lord, and wanted to flatter Him. He said, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (Jn. 3:1). Jesus said, in essence, "Let's stop the flattery and get right to the point." He then said, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus then asked, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus did not even answer his question. Instead He said, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." His point was that He did not expect Nicodemus to go back into his mother's womb and be born a second time. Rather, he needed to be born spiritually "of water (baptism) and of the Spirit (a reference to the Word of God that we possess today—1 Peter 1:22-25, which teaches that we are born again by the Word of God).

Christians are called to obey the Gospel and to live the Christian life. It is interesting that Peter recounts this entire conversion story in Acts 11 to the Jewish Christians (for a very important purpose). Some of the Jewish Christians were still prejudiced. Some of them were advocating circumcision. Others were unsure about accepting the Gentiles. So Peter recounted the story of Cornelius' conversion and all that happened. Then in Acts 11:14 Peter explained that he was to speak words whereby Cornelius and his household "would be saved." Today, too, people must hear the Word of God in order to be saved. A person cannot be saved by some feeling that arrives in the middle of the night. God is not going to speak to you in a still, quiet voice. Instead, God speaks through the voice of His Son. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son." How does God speak to us today? He speaks through the Gospel—the message that He has left us. We, like Cornelius, must "hear words whereby we must be saved." Those who heard those words and obeyed them were called in Acts 11 by a very special name. In Acts 11:26 we find one of the most important verses in the whole Bible. "And the disciples were first called **Christians** in Antioch." What were followers of Christ called? What were those people called who obeyed the Gospel and did the will of God? Were they called by some kind of denominational name? Were they called by the name of Paul, Apollos, or Peter? No. What were the first-century disciples called? They were called "Christians." If we have the same Bible, and if we have the same plan of salvation, and if we do what they did, then what should we call ourselves? Christians. We ought to call ourselves by the name that glorifies the Lord Who died for us. Why would people want to call themselves by a man's name? Why would a person name himself after Martin Luther? Why would a person name himself after John Wesley or the message that he established? Did Martin Luther die for you? Did John Wesley do anything to secure your salvation? Why not be just "a Christian"—nothing more, nothing less. We ought to be today what people were in the first century—simply New Testament Christians. That is important.

This name is mentioned two other times in the Bible. In Acts 26:28 the Gospel is preached to Agrippa, who says, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." We need more people who will not say "almost," but who instead will "altogether" become Christians. In 1 Peter 4:16 we learn that on occasion we, as God's people, may suffer "as Christians."

In Acts 12, there are two events that occur that are very important. First, in Acts 12 God triumphs over King Herod—the evil, ungodly king who had put James to death. Herod stands before the people to give a great oration, and the people shout, "The voice of a god, not the voice of a man." Instead of telling them, "No, I'm just a man," he accepts their praise. And as a result, he was eaten with worms and died. But, second, do you know what happened to the Word of God? Look at Acts 12:24. In times when ungodly men rise up and claim to be god, or try to kill Christians and stamp out the church, here is what happens. "The word of God grew and multiplied." In difficult times, when people were being put to death for being Christians, what happened? Did Christians throw in the towel and give up? If we stay true to the Lord and His kingdom, and if we continue to preach the Word, what will happen? The Word of God will "grow and be multiplied." Too many times we are quick to give up. We throw in the towel before we ought to. If we will remain faithful, even in the face of persecution, God will do His part. He said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). He told us, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

After considering the conversions of Saul and Cornelius, we invite you to do exactly what they did. Hear the Word. Believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Having believed in Him, repent of your past sins. Turn from sin to God. Confess Jesus Christ as God's Son, and be

baptized in water for the remission of your sins. If you have not become a Christian, we want you to know that God loves you and that we love you. Why not obey the Gospel of Christ before it is too late?

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “THE GOSPEL IN SAMARIA” (ACTS 9-12)

1. Whose conversion from sin to salvation do we find discussed in Acts 9?
2. According to Acts 9:1,4, what was the man mentioned in question #1 above doing to the Lord’s church in the first century?
3. What happened to this man, according to Acts 9:3-8?
4. According to Acts 9:6, what question did the man mentioned in question #1 ask?
5. Who did God send to preach the Gospel to the man mentioned in question #1?
6. According to Acts 22:16, what did the servant of God tell the man he needed to do in order to be saved?
7. What important message do we find in Matthew 17:5?
8. According to Matthew 7:21, who will **not** be saved?
9. According to Matthew 7:21, who **will** be saved?
10. According to Acts 9:11, what two things was the man mentioned in question #1 above doing?
11. Where in the Bible do we find “the sinner’s prayer”?
12. According to Romans 6:1-4, where do sinners come into contact with the saving blood of Christ?
13. According to Romans 6:1-4, when an individual is baptized, he or she reenacts three things that happened to Christ. What are those three things?
14. What, according to Jesus’ own words in Matthew 26:28, remits our sins?
15. What, according to 1 Peter 3:21, saves us?
16. To what important individual are we introduced in Acts 10?
17. Why is the individual mentioned in question #16 above important in the Book of Acts?
18. What important question did Peter ask in Acts 10:47?
19. According to Acts 10:1-4, the man mentioned in question #16 was a good, moral individual. Was that enough to save him?
20. Who, according to 1 Timothy 2:4, does God want to be saved?
21. What is so important about Acts 11:26?