

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

ACTS LESSON 5

The Gospel into All the World (Acts 17-19)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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

“These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). Welcome to our study of Acts 17-19. The apostle Paul is now going to begin taking the Gospel to the entire world. He begins in Acts 17 by going to Thessalonica. He then moves on to Berea, to Corinth, and eventually into the region of Thessalonica. There is a brother there by the name of Jason, who is a supporter of the Gospel. This man and his family, along with Paul and others, received great persecution because of their belief in Jesus. Because of their willingness to preach the Gospel, he and his household were dragged into prison by evil men. They had to give securities, and great harm was done to them because of the cause of Christ. From this section of Scripture we can learn that there are going to be times when we suffer persecution as a child of God living in a difficult and evil world. We are going to be tempted. We are going to be tried. People will try to persecute us for our belief in Christ. But this should not come as a shock to us, since the Bible teaches us that persecutions are going to come. Notice what Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:12—“All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus **will** suffer persecution.” It is a fact that if we are living a godly life, if we are opposing that which is evil (Eph. 5:11), and if we are living righteously in an unrighteous world, then we **are** going to have to endure persecution. Paul did. In Acts 14:22 Paul said, after having been stoned and left for dead, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”

Troubles and trials **are** going to come, but what really matters is what we **do** with those types of persecution. They can affect us in several ways. If we allow them to do so, we can get discouraged, get down, lose our faith in God, and say simply, “The whole world is against us, including God!” Or, we can look at those persecutions and say, “If I will endure this, and if I will be true to God, then I will come out stronger on the other side.” In James 1:2-4, James said, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” Trials and persecutions can help complete us. They can help us see areas in our life that need work. I am reminded of what the psalmist said in Psalm 119:67,71, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.... It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.” Afflictions, trials, and troubles can shake us to our very core and cause us to ask ourselves, “What is really important in this life?” So, yes, persecution will come, but such persecution can become a spiritual joy to us as we learn to grow in Christ.

Notice in Acts 17:6, as Jason, Paul, and others in this area are teaching the Gospel, what the people on the outside said about them: “These who have turned the world upside down have come here, too.” How did these people view Christianity? They viewed it as having turned the world upside down. But in reality Christianity turned the world right-side-up. As Christians, we ought to be seen as examples to those in the world. People living in sin ought to be able to look to us to see what it means to live a righteous life. Jesus taught

us to be an example to the world. In Matthew 5:16 Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." People ought to look to us as a light—a shining example—in a world of darkness. To a world that is "upside down" and steeped in sin, we ought to show the true way of living. In 1 Timothy 4:12 Paul said to the young evangelist, "Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity." In every area of life we as Christians ought to be an example.

Now I want us to turn our attention to one of the most thrilling passages in the Book of Acts—Acts 17:11. Remember that in Acts 17:1-10 the Gospel had not been received well in Thessalonica. Notice, however, what is said in contrast about those in Berea. "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). The apostle Paul came into the region of Berea. He began to knock on people's doors to ask them if they had heard about Jesus. They did not slam the door in his face and say, "We do not want to hear this!" They said, "Come in and let us hear what you have to say." They received the word with readiness. They were ready to hear, but they did not simply take what they heard at face value. They did not simply accept what they heard "just because Paul said so." What did they do next? This is one of the keys to being right with God and having a relationship that is based on the Scriptures. These people, after having heard the Word, "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." They took what Paul said. Maybe they wrote it down on one side, and then they compared it with what their Scriptures said. If the two lined up, then they believed it. **That** is how we produce a faith that is based upon Scripture. What is faith? Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Our faith must be Bible-based. And the only way that it can be that way is if we look to the Scriptures as our only guide. This passage impresses upon our minds two very important principles. First, we need to have God's authority for everything we believe and do in life. The people in Berea got out the Scriptures and checked things against them. Their view was, "If God said it, then we will accept it." That is the attitude we today need to have. In John 2:5, Mary, the mother of Jesus, said, "What He says to you, do it." That is the attitude we must have. We must look to The Book to see if there is authority for everything we do. In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus said that all authority had been given to Him. He is the Head of the church (Eph. 1:21-23). It is His words, not the words and teachings of men, that will one day judge us (Jn. 12:48). We must understand that we must have God's approval for everything we do.

This also teaches us that we need to be good students of the Scriptures. If we are going to be like the Bereans and be fair minded (or noble, as some versions say), then we need to be people who know the Bible well. We need to be able to get out our Bibles and know what God says. The only way to do that is to study. In 2 Timothy 2:15 we are told, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." How can we "rightly divide" God's Word? How can we apply it purposely to our lives? Here's how—by searching the Scriptures daily and by studying the Word of God. This is a command that applies to all Christians. In 1 Peter 3:15 we are told, "Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." The only way to **be** ready is to **get** ready. We need to make sure that we know God's Word and that we are living our lives by it every day. The Scriptures are what give us light in a world of darkness. In Psalm 119:105 we are told, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Having the Scriptures in our lives is one way for us to ensure that sin is not living within us. In Psalm 119:11, we are told, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!" This passage surely impresses upon our minds the need to hear, to hear carefully, and to examine

our lives via the Scriptures. How much good it would do for people in the religious world if, when they heard a message from some man, to get out their Bibles and examine what that man had to say. For example, someone might come to you and say, "All you have to do to be saved is believe in Jesus, and you will go to Heaven." While it is true that a person must believe in Christ ("If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins, Jn. 8:24), consider the statement, "All you have to do to be saved is believe in Jesus," and compare it against the Scriptures. In James 2:24 we see a clear example of how we can learn that this claim is not true. James said, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." When we look at the Bible, we learn that there are many doctrines taught by men that cannot be examined via the Scriptures and found to be true.

As we look farther in Acts 17, we see Paul coming into the region of Athens, which was a great center of learning in the world of Paul's day. But it also was a very idolatrous place. As Paul came into the city, he was moved with a righteous zeal or anger (vs. 15) because he saw these people who were given over to idolatry. This righteous indignation caused him to preach the Gospel to these people. This reminds me of Jesus in John 2. As Jesus entered into the temple and saw the moneychangers making God's house into a den of thieves, He was moved with a righteous indignation that caused Him to drive those people out of the temple. Paul had a similar righteous indignation against idolatry. It was this emotion that caused him to want to preach the Gospel to those people. In verse 22 we learn that these people were very "religious" people. But just because they were religious did not mean that they were right with God. In verses 20-22 Paul said that he could tell that they were very religious, and that they were worshiping gods in whom they believed. But Paul wanted them to know that just because they were religious, it did not mean that they were right with God. From this, we today learn that just because someone uses religious words, or dresses in what they believe to be a religious way, and is seen by others as a "religious person," it does not necessarily mean that he or she is right with God. Looking religious on the outside is not what is important to God. No, we do not need to dress in an inappropriate or immodest way. But there are people in Matthew 6 who wore the right clothes, and who stood on the street corners and said the right words, but Jesus said of these people that they were hypocrites who went all the way around the world to make a proselyte, yet made him twice as much as son of hell as they were. We therefore need to learn from Acts 17 that neither idolatry nor "appearing religious" is to be equated with godliness. These people were so idolatrous that they even had a statue labeled, "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD," just in case they had omitted some God. This is how bad they were. Paul saw various statues to several "gods"—Zeus, Hermes, and others. Then he walked a little farther and found a statue that said, "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD." The attitude of the people was, "This statue is for any god whom we might have accidentally omitted." Basically, that is what this statue was for. This is how bad off these people were. So, it was a very idolatrous society—one in which the people did not correctly worship God.

Paul therefore takes this opportunity to say, "You have this statue labeled, 'TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.' Let me tell you about this God, Whom you do not know. This God created the world. He created all men of one blood. He is the Giver of all good things, just as your own poets have said." Then in Acts 17:30-31 Paul brought his sermon to a climax by saying, "These times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." Paul wanted the people of Athens to know that there was a time in the past when God did not bring punishment on the people for their sins. But now God "commands all men everywhere to repent." Why does God command people to repent? It is because "He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him [Jesus Christ] from the

dead.” The very fact that Jesus came, lived a perfect life, died as a sacrifice, and made salvation available to all people, represents the culmination of God’s plan. And because that plan is now in effect, God commands all men everywhere to repent. He has given proof, through the resurrection of Christ, that this is the case. Christ was seen after His resurrection by over 500 people (1 Cor. 15:6). The record shows through Scripture that Jesus was raised. The empty tomb forever stands as proof that He is alive. That fact, in and of itself, calls for people today to repent and to live their lives the way God wants them to. Thus the basic message is, “Repent or perish.” We need to be people who are ready to change our hearts. In Acts 3:19 Paul preached, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” Jesus impressed upon the disciples’ minds, and upon those who heard Him speak, the necessity of repentance (Lk. 13:3). There, He said, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” The principle is: believe in Christ; repent and change your ways, for now is the day of salvation.

In Acts 18 the Gospel moves into the region around Corinth. Some of the people in this area hear the Gospel when Paul preaches it, and they believe it. In fact, in Acts 18:8 we find what might be called “the Gospel in a nutshell.” “Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.” What was the plan of salvation that these people obeyed in the first century? Whatever it was, it will be the same for us today. They heard the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). They believed, and they were convicted in their hearts. In Acts 2:37 we read, “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’” They were convicted that Christ was God’s Son, and were convicted of their own sin. Then they were baptized into Jesus. No doubt repentance was included in their conviction. These people were then baptized into the body of Christ. Just like these people in the first century, so we today must hear God’s Word, believe in Jesus, repent and change our lives, and be baptized in order to be right with God. It is so odd that there are so many people in the religious world today who think that baptism is not essential to salvation. But that is in direct conflict with what the Scriptures teach. The Scriptures repeatedly teach that baptism is something a person must do in order to be saved. We are not saying that a person must be baptized in order to “earn” salvation. Rather, it is a condition, just like belief. It is something that God has told us to do. Thus, because God said it, we are willing to do it. We cannot look up to Heaven and say, “I have now earned my salvation!” because baptism is simply a condition of that salvation. Listen to what Jesus said in Mark 16:16. He said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” Jesus said that if a person does not believe, and therefore is not baptized, then he or she will not be saved. Someone might say, “But that’s just one verse.” Consider Acts 2:38, then. When the Jews were cut to the heart and cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (asking what they could do to rid themselves of the sin of having crucified their own Messiah), Peter said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” What about Paul’s conversion? In Acts 9:4-6 Paul was struck by a light on the road to Damascus. He said, “Lord, who are You?” Christ said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Paul then asked, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” In Acts 22:16 we find the answer to that question. Ananias says, “Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” The text of 1 Peter 3:21 is so simple that even a child can understand it. Peter said, “Baptism does now also save us.” It does not say that baptism **alone** saves us, but that baptism “also” (that is, combined with hearing, believing, and repenting) saves us. Someone might ask, “Where in the Bible does it say that baptism saves?” Here is where—in 1 Peter 3:21 (“baptism does now also save us”).

As Paul continues in Acts 18, we see in verses 9 and 10 that he approaches people who are not accustomed to hearing the Gospel. Paul is not ashamed. We read, "The Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.'" Paul may have been a little nervous at times, but he learned that he did not need to be afraid, but should instead move forward and do the will of God. How true that is for us today, too. Those of us who plan to be faithful followers of Jesus must never be ashamed of our Lord. Paul said in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation." What do you think Jesus would think if He knew that some of us who claim to be His followers are ashamed to tell others about Him? How sad that would be.

We learn about another man in Acts 18 who was a man with good intentions. Apollos was an eloquent speaker, but who was teaching the baptism of John. In verses 24-26 we learn that Priscilla and Aquila pulled Apollos aside to teach him the Gospel "more perfectly." Look at what Acts 18:26 says about Apollos: "So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately." Here was a man who was doing all he could. All he knew about Jesus, he was out preaching it. He was preaching openly in the synagogues. Priscilla and Aquila knew a little more about the plan of salvation, and had come to a better understanding of such matters. So, they pulled him aside and taught him "the way of God more accurately." How we need more people like Apollos. He was a man who, when he was taught the way of the Lord more accurately, took what he had learned, checked it against the Scriptures, and went out and started preaching it in such a way that it could not be refuted. He accepted it because it was in the Scriptures, and because it was according to the will of God. Apollos was willing to change. Someone might have said, "Apollos, that's not what you preached earlier. Why did you change?" He likely would have said, "Because I learned better!" Apollos did not have a problem with pride, and evidently was an humble man who was willing to learn and be taught the way of the Lord more accurately. How we need people like that today—who, although they may be religious, may be confused about some things, yet would be willing to be pulled aside and taught the Scriptures so that their hearts could be opened better to the Word and will of God. Apollos knew only the baptism of John (which was preached in Acts 19). It was a baptism that had been commanded by God (Mt. 21:25). It was a sort of preparatory baptism that prepared people for the Lord. It was for the forgiveness of sins (Lk. 3:3). But we also learn of John's baptism that it was not a permanent baptism (Lk. 3:16). Notice what is said in Acts 19:2-5 about John's baptism. Paul said to some people, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They said, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." He then asks, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." And "when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." These people had been baptized properly according to the baptism of John, but they did not know anything about Jesus' baptism. When they learned about the baptism of Christ, then they were willing to obey God and be baptized with that baptism.

As Paul continues in Acts 19, he receives some persecution for preaching "The Way" (Acts 19:9). We learn that this is The Way of Christ. In John 14:6 Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Jesus is "the way" because He is the only way for people to be saved. The city of Ephesus was an evil and idolatrous city where people had to burn their books of witchcraft when the Gospel arrived. Look at the power of the Gospel. Some might say, "The Gospel didn't do too well in an evil

world.” But according to Acts 19:20 that is not true—“So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.” Here is an encouraging passage that shows us when the Gospel came to the region around Ephesus, people heard the Word of God, and obeyed it. This was true because the power is not in men, but is in the Word of God. In Romans 1:16, Paul spoke of the Gospel as God’s power to save. We are told in James 1:21 that we should “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” This passage reminds me of Acts 12, where it looked like Christianity was going to be snuffed out. James, a great leader in the first-century church, had been beheaded. Herod was giving an oration, and the people were crying out, “The voice of a god, not the voice of a man!” But the tables turned toward the end of that chapter. Herod was eaten with worms and died. And in Acts 12:24 we read, “The word of God grew and multiplied.” God’s Word took hold in the lives of those people, and because of their belief in Jesus, they escaped a sinful and evil world.

That same message is so true for us. In a world where sin seems to be running rampant, you can overcome the evil, the iniquity, and the wickedness, and you can prepare your soul to live in eternity with God. Your soul is the most important thing you have. Jesus said in Mark 8:36-37, “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Your soul is the most important thing you have. And the only way you can make it right with God is by obeying the Gospel. Are you a Christian? If the Book of Acts teaches us anything, it teaches us that we need to obey the Gospel and become children of God. If you are not a Christian, you need to become one today by believing that Jesus is the Son of God, by being willing to repent of those things in your life that are not right, by confessing Christ’s name before men, and by being baptized in water for the remission of your sins. It is our hope and prayer today that you, just like the Bereans, will search the Scriptures daily to see if these things are so.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR ACTS LESSON 5 (CHAPTERS 17-19)

1. What did the Bereans do in Acts 17:11 that caused the apostle Paul to commend them so heartily?
2. According to Acts 17:7, what charge did the Jews level against Jason and other Christians in the city of Thessalonica?
3. What did Paul tell Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12?
4. In James 1:2-4, what advice did James give Christians in regard to various trials and tribulations?
5. How, according to Psalm 119:67,71, can trials and tribulations actually serve to make us better?
6. In Acts 17:6 the Jews made a statement which showed that the Christians' teachings were having a real impact on the people of Thessalonica. What was that statement?
7. Matthew 5:16 offers a way for Christians today to make a real impact. What does that verse suggest in this regard?
8. According to Romans 10:17, what is the source of a Christian's faith?
9. In 2 Timothy 2:15, what did Paul admonish Timothy (and all Christians) to do?
10. In 1 Peter 3:15, what did Peter admonish all Christians to do?
11. According to Acts 17:23, what did Paul see in Athens that filled him with righteous indignation?
12. In Acts 17:30-31 Paul said that, in the past, God had ignored something, but now He no longer does. What was that "something"?
13. In the last portion of Acts 18:8 we find what has been referred to as "the Gospel in a nutshell." What does it say that the Corinthians did to become Christians?
14. In Acts 2:37, what question did the Jews on the Day of Pentecost ask Peter and the other apostles?
15. In Acts 2:38, how did Peter answer the Jews' question (as asked in Acts 2:37)?
16. What does Acts 2:21 say?
17. In Acts 22:16, what did Ananias tell Saul that he needed to do in order to "call upon the name of the Lord"?
18. According to 1 Peter 3:21, what is the final step in salvation—the step that rids a person of his or her sins?