

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

ACTS LESSON 7

The Gospel into All the World (Acts 23-25)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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

“I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1). Welcome to our study of the Book of Acts as we continue in Acts 23-25, where the apostle Paul spreads the Gospel to the entire world. His ultimate goal is to travel to Rome itself according to the purpose of God. Thus, in Acts 23-25 Paul is preaching the Gospel to kings, to the Jews, and to the Gentiles. This was the promise made in Acts 9:15. When God told Ananias to go take the Gospel to Saul of Tarsus, an evil man of whom Ananias had heard, God said, “He [Saul] is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.” Thus, God sent Ananias to Saul. And from that moment forth, after Saul had obeyed the Gospel, he was on a journey (a mission) to spread the Gospel to as many lost people as he could. The apostle Paul was a man who always tried to do what he thought was right. But from this we also learn that our conscience is not a safe guide in religious matters. In Acts 23:1, as the apostle Paul stood before the Jewish council, said, “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” According to Paul’s conscience, and according to the knowledge that he had at the time, Paul thought he was doing right. He had lived in all good conscience before God. He felt like it was the right thing, but it was not. Think about that. Paul said, “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” Back up to places like Acts 7 when Saul (who would later become Paul) was holding the coats of those who stoned Stephen. Was he “living in all good conscience” then? Yes. He thought he was doing right. What about passages like Acts 8 where Saul was wreaking havoc upon the church and was dragging men and women into prison as he tried to get them to stop following Christ. Paul said, “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” All of Paul’s life he had thought he was doing right. But our conscience is not a safe guide in religious matters. A person may “feel” that he is right or “think” that he is right, and based upon his past experience, that may be his thoughts on the matter. But a man’s conscience is not a safe guide in religious matters. The only safe guide in religious matters is the Word of God. In John 8:32 Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Unless a man’s heart is trained by the Word of God, and unless his conscience is guided by the Scriptures, then he cannot guarantee that he will be right. The truth is what is of supreme importance. In Proverbs 23:23 the Bible says, “Buy the truth and sell it not.” That is what is important. So today I would like us to consider how, in several areas of life, our conscience cannot be a safe guide.

First, our conscience is not a safe guide in worship. Just because our families have always worshiped in a certain way, does not mean that is **right**. Just because we “feel like” we are right, or just because some religious leader gave us his opinion on what he “thinks” is right, does not mean that it **is** right. Our conscience is not a safe guide in worship. What **is** a safe guide in worship? There is only one. In John 4:24 Jesus said, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” Yes, we must put our heart, soul, mind, and strength into worship. We must put our “all” into our worship. But what is our

governor or guide in worship? It is the phrase, “in spirit **and in truth.**” Someone might ask, “What is truth?” Pilate asked that very question in John 18:36. But Jesus had already answered it in John 17:17—“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” In worship, the Word of God is to be our guide. Yet it is so sad that many people give in to their consciences in worship. For example, a lot of people will have women leading songs, prayers, or even preaching in worship. But that is not what the Scriptures say that we are to do. In 1 Timothy 2:11-12, we read, “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.” In 1 Corinthians 14:34 we learn that women are to keep silence in the worship assembly of the church. God has not placed women in a role of authority in worship. Someone might say, “But I thought it was all right to do such a thing.” Our “thoughts” are not the proper way by which to authorize something in regard to worship to God. Our thoughts and our feelings are not safe guides in worship. Someone might say, “Well, what about instrumental music?” A lot of people have been misguided concerning instrumental music in worship to God. They may “feel” like it is right or “think” that it is right, and their consciences may even tell them that it is right, but none of those things is based upon Scripture. In Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 the Bible says that we are to sing one to another, making melody in our hearts as we sing unto the Lord. Everything the New Testament says about singing has to do with a cappella music. Singing is to be done with the voice, without the accompaniment of music instruments. If there is no authority in the New Testament for things like the use of instrumental music, then we must not use them.

Someone might ask, “What about salvation? Isn’t the conscience a safe guide in matters of salvation?” Let’s look at the Old Testament example of Naaman. In 2 Kings 5, Naaman had leprosy. He had heard about a prophet, and about how that prophet had done some healing. Naaman wanted to be healed by the prophet. The prophet told him to go dip seven times in the River Jordan. The dirty River Jordan?! Naaman wanted to know why he could not use a cleaner river. He thought to himself, “I thought that the prophet would come with some great pomp and circumstance, wave his hands, and do some great thing.” Do you know what was wrong with Naaman in this instance? He “thought.” He thought that God was going to do it **his** way. Instead of thinking that God will do it our way, we need to get in line with the Word of God and do what God says. There are so many people who have been misled by their consciences on matters of salvation—matters that are eternal in nature. So many people have been told that if they will follow the pope, they will all right. Nothing is a greater lie in religion than the idea that one person outside of Jesus Christ can get us to Heaven. Where is the authority within the Bible for a pope, anyway? In Matthew 23:9 Jesus Himself said, “Call no man ‘father.’” In a religious sense, we are not to call anyone “father” because there is no authority for doing such a thing. Peter was not the first pope. The text of 1 Peter 5:1-2 teaches that Peter was an elder. One of the qualifications of an elder is that he must be married and have children. So, yes, people do things based on following their conscience, but our conscience is not a safe guide.

Someone might say, “Well, when it comes to salvation, we believe that all a person has to do is come down to the altar, say the sinner’s prayer, and you will be all right with God.” A lot of people—based on their consciences—have gone that way. But is that really a safe guide? It is interesting to note that in the New Testament you **never** see anyone being saved by “the sinner’s prayer.” In fact, you can look in the New Testament from the front to the back, reading it from beginning to end, and you will not find a modern-type “sinner’s prayer.” It simply is not there. People were saved in the New Testament in a very specific way. In Acts 18:8 the Bible says, “Many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.” They heard the Word of God. They believed in Jesus. They were willing to change their ways. They were willing to confess that Jesus was the Christ. And then,

like Paul in Acts 22:16, they arose, were baptized, and washed away their sins as they called upon the name of the Lord. May we learn from Paul's example in Acts 23 that our conscience is not a safe guide.

In Acts 23:2-3, Paul says some things against the high priest. In fact, he even calls him "a whitewashed wall." But here, Paul learns that he must leave vengeance up to God. We need to learn that same principle today. Notice Acts 23:2-3. We must learn to leave our vengeance to God. God is the One Who is going to repay. Paul learned that he must not speak against a ruler of the people, but that God would eventually reap vengeance upon this ungodly man. In Romans 12:19 the Bible says, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." How do we respond when people do something evil to us? When someone calls us an ungodly name, when someone does physical harm to you, or when someone does something to you that you know is not right, do you think to yourself, "I won't get mad, I'll just get even!?" That is not the way a Christian is supposed to think. We ought not to want to get mad or to get even. Rather, we ought to be willing to say that God will take care of this matter on His terms. We should hope and pray that the person will change his ways and repent. But on the final day, God will take care of the matter. This is why Christians are to love their enemies (Mt. 5:44-45). This is why we are to pray for those who spitefully use us. We do this because, as children of God, we are hopeful that people will change their ways. But ultimately we know that vengeance belongs to the Lord.

In Acts 23, the Jews are now going to set up a plan to take Paul's life. They come to the commander and say, "We want you to bring Paul by here at a certain time. We will have forty men waiting who have taken an oath that they will not eat until Paul dies." Do you know what is interesting about that oath? The men were never able to kill Paul. It was a rash oath. The men said, "We are not going to eat until we kill Paul!" But they never got a chance to kill the apostle. So did they die from starvation? No. These people made a rash oath. In the Bible we learn a lot about making rash oaths. In Ecclesiastes 5:2 we are told not to do that. Jesus, too, said, "Let your 'yes' be yes and your 'no,' no" (Mt. 5:37). Jephthah (Judg. 11:30-31) is a sad example of a rash oath. He promised God that if God would give him the victory, he would give God the first thing that walked out of his house as a sacrifice. He came home, and one of his sweet, beautiful daughters came out of the house. He gave her as a sacrifice to God. Foolish, rash oaths must never be made by Christians. We need to say "yes" or "no," and then follow through with our words. As the Jews' plan was put into action, it did not come to fruition because of one of Paul's younger kinfolds (specifically, one of his sister's children). The boy hears of the plan (that the Jews plan to lie in wait for Paul), and he tells Paul, who then tells him to go tell the commander. The boy does, and as a result the Jews' plan is thwarted. Paul and those with him leave during the night to go to another area. Paul is thus taken care of. But here is what I want you to learn from this lesson. This young child did a great service to Paul and to the kingdom of God. Young people can do great things in God's kingdom. What did Paul say to Timothy? "Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). Young people play an important role in the kingdom of God. This young man was just a child, yet he helped get the Gospel to Rome by telling what he had heard. Young people can do the same thing today, and can be helpful in God's plan by living the lives they ought to live. Young people can be helpful by being an example to older people. A young person never knows how much an older person in the congregation may be looking to him or her as an example. A young person can especially serve as a good example to his or her friends—an example of what it really means to live the Christian life. So many people have no idea what "living a Christian life" actually means. But Christians do. And young people can provide a powerful example of that for the world around them.

In Acts 24, we see Paul being taken before Felix, the governor of Caesarea. Felix has some sort of religion about him. He knows something about Christ and Christianity. So, he calls to hear the apostle Paul. Watch what happens in Acts 24:25 during Paul's three-point sermon to Felix. "Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, 'Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.'" Paul did not hold back just because he was standing in front of someone who was important. In fact, Paul viewed being in front of Felix as part of his mission (Acts 9:15), and thus he preached the message of God to him. What did he preach? Righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come. You will not find a clearer or more-powerful sermon than that in the Bible. Felix was a man who, according to history, was not a very righteous man. His marriage was not righteous. His relationships with others had not always been righteous. And he was not known as being an upright person. So what did Paul do? He said, "Felix, you need to get right with God." You need to live a righteous life. What is righteousness? Righteousness is simply the act of right-doing. It is a person trying to do what is right. It is trying to be holy and pure. In 1 Peter 2:21, we are told to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. That is what trying to be righteous is all about. In 1 Peter 1:15 we are told to be holy as God, Who called us, also is holy. So, we try to live the right kind of life. Does that mean we will be perfect? No. We will sin and fall. But we pick ourselves up, confess our sins, and we try to walk in the light (1 Jn. 1:7-10). That is what righteousness is all about. So, Paul preaches about righteousness. He preaches about self-control. In these times, rulers during the era in which Felix lived were not given to self-control. In fact, they were given to worldly lusts and pleasures in abundance—whether it was alcohol, sex, or other things of such a nature. They gave in to all of that. So, Paul said, "Felix, you need to live right and control yourself." One attribute of a Christian that sets him apart from the world is that he is able to control himself. He does not let his passions run amok. He does not let his passions control him. Instead, he controls his passions and his life. He lives as a sacrifice to Jesus each and every day. In Romans 12:1-2 the Bible records Paul as saying,

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

That is what a Christian does. He lives as a sacrifice for Jesus each and every day. Self-control means that we give up self in order to live for Christ. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, we learn that we have been bought at a price. Therefore we are to glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits, which are God's. We no longer belong to ourselves. Rather, we are to live every day for Jesus Christ. Do you remember what Jesus commanded in Luke 9:23? He said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Self-control means that we die to ourselves and that we then live for Jesus. That is really what our purpose in life is all about. In Isaiah 43:7, God said, "Everyone who is called by My name, Whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him." We were made to glorify God. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 explains to us the purpose of life. Solomon had looked everywhere for the purpose and meaning of life. He tried wine, women, building, gardening, etc. You name it, and he had tried it. But then he said, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil." Thus, we are to live a righteous life. We are to live a life of self-control—being controlled by the spirit of Christ so that we live in such a way as to glorify God.

But notice Paul's third point. Paul preached about "righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come." This is probably what scared Felix the most. He learned that this was going to be a time when all men stood before God to give an account. In Acts 17:30-31 we read,

"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."

One day there **is** going to be a judgment. We **will** stand before God and give an account of how we have lived. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:10, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." Ecclesiastes 12:14 tells us, "God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil." We are going to stand before God, and everything we have done in this life—even the things that no one knows, and the things that we think we have hidden from the whole world—will be exposed because God knows and sees them. Hebrews 4:13 says, "There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." Proverbs 15:3 says, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good." Are we going to respond as Felix did—in fear? Look at what Felix said. Paul had just preached to him about "righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come." Felix was afraid. He responded in fear—which was the wrong kind of response because it was a response that would end only in condemnation. Felix then said, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you" (Acts 24:25). How sad that is. Felix heard the Gospel, and it made him afraid. Instead of being motivated by that fear to get his life right with God, he chose to avoid the problem. "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." Sadly, that more convenient time may not have come. There is never a "more convenient time" than right now! The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 6:2, "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." "Now" is all we have. Life is so short and so brief that we **must** take advantage of "the here and now." The psalmist reminded us of the brevity of life in Psalm 89:47 when he said, "Remember how short my time is." Life is like a vapor—here for a little while, and then it vanishes away.

In Acts 25, Paul continues on his way toward Rome, where he will be introduced to a man by the name of Festus. In verses 9-11, we see Paul being accused of being "mad" or insane. He responds by saying that he is not mad. In verse 11 we find an important statement being made about Paul and his faith. Paul says, "I do not object to dying." Can **we** say that today? Have we lived our lives in such a way that we can say, "If you want to put me to death, I don't object to dying"? For the child of God, dying is not a bad thing, but is instead a good thing. If we have lived faithfully before the Lord, then our deaths ought to be the most glorious day of our lives. The psalmist said in Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." How does God view the death of one His children? It is precious to Him. Revelation 14:13 says, "'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.'" Death is not the worst thing that can happen to us. Paul had already said in Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." When a person truly dies to self, he has no problem giving up his life for the cause of Christ. Revelation 2:10 teaches us that we must be faithful "even unto death."

Now I would like to turn our attention to Acts 25:12 where we see an important insight into Paul's life. Paul had appealed to Caesar, so Festus, "when he had conferred with the council, answered, 'You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!'" Remember

that this was God's ultimate purpose for Paul. Paul made that appeal, but all the while you can see the Master Weaver—God—working His plan through Paul. Now the Gospel is going to go to Rome. Augustus Caesar is about to come into contact with Paul. Some in Caesar's house, we learn later, will obey the Gospel. The impact and influence of the Gospel was about to go to the center of the then-known world—the Roman Empire. And it was going to have an awesome effect.

I want you to know today that our goal in teaching these lessons and talking about the Book of Acts is so that you can have the hope of Heaven. Our goal and mission is to bring the Gospel to as many lost people as possible. So today I want to ask you: What is your relationship with the Lord? Are you **really** living the life that you **ought** to live? If you have a life that is stained by sin, you need to realize that there are going to be horrible consequences to reap during eternity. The Bible says that all of us sin. Romans 3:10 says that there is "none righteous, no, not one." Romans 3:23 says that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Sin causes us to be separated from a holy God. Isaiah 59:1-2 tells us, "The Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear." Ezekiel 18:4 says, "The soul who sins shall die." Romans 6:23 tells us that "the wages of sin is death." If you are living a life of sin, you need to know that if you die that way, you will not be prepared for the judgment. You will be lost for eternity.

But here is the good news. God does not want you to be lost. We do not want you to be lost. Jesus does not want you to be lost. He did everything He could to prevent that. The Bible says that God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). Because God wants that, He has done everything possible to make sure that the truth is available to everyone. In Titus 2:11-13 we learn that the grace of God that brings salvation is available to all men. How do people receive God's grace and salvation today? The Bible teaches that there are five steps in the plan of salvation. A person must be willing to hear the Word of God. Romans 10:17 says, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Once a person has heard the Word of God, he or she then must believe, and must be convicted of the message in order to believe in Jesus. In John 8:24 Jesus said, "If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." Once a person believes in Christ, he or she must be willing to repent and begin living a different type of life. Jesus said in Luke 13:3, "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Then a person must confess that Jesus is God's Son. Romans 10:10 tells us, "With the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." We must make the good confession, as the Ethiopian eunuch did in Acts 8:37 when he said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Then a person must be baptized into Christ for remission of sins. In John 3, Nicodemus was told how to enter the kingdom of Heaven. Jesus said, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:5). In Mark 16:16 Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." Peter told the people on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38), "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." Today, let me ask you if you have obeyed the Gospel. Are you sure that you are right with God? Are you a New Testament Christian? If not, why would you want to wait another moment? Do not live your life based upon your conscience or upon what others have done. Rather, submit your will to the will of God, and live according to the Gospel of Christ.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR ACTS LESSON 7 (CHAPTERS 23-25)

1. According to Acts 23:1, how had Paul lived his life up until that particular point in time?
2. What promise did God make in Acts 9:15 concerning Saul (Paul)?
3. According to Jesus' statement in John 8:32, which is more important—how we feel about something, or the actual truth of God's Word concerning the matter?
4. What does Proverbs 23:23 urge us to do?
5. What does Proverbs 23:23 urge us **not** to do?
6. According to John 4:24, how are we to worship God?
7. According to John 17:17, what is truth?
8. Give the book, chapter, and verse in the Bible where the modern-day type of "sinner's prayer" is found (that is, the prayer that a person is to pray to receive salvation).
9. According to Acts 18:8, what did the people of Corinth do to be saved?
10. What important point is contained in Romans 12:19?
11. What important point is contained in Matthew 5:44-45?
12. Before whom did the apostle Paul appear in Acts 24?
13. According to Acts 24:25, what three points did Paul's sermon on that occasion contain?
14. What does 1 Peter 1:15 command us to do?
15. What, according to Ecclesiastes 12:13, is man's purpose in life?
16. At one point in the past, according to Acts 17:30, God ignored something. What was it?
17. According to Acts 17:30, what does God now command all men to do?
18. What did Felix say to Paul in Acts 24:25 after hearing the apostle's sermon?
19. When, according to 2 Corinthians 6:2, is the appropriate time for a person to be saved?
20. According to Ecclesiastes 12:14, what will God do on the Day of Judgment?
21. Of what important fact of life does Psalm 89:47 remind us?
22. What does Hebrews 4:13 tell us about so-called "secret sins"?
23. According to Revelation 14:13, who are "the blessed"?