

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

ACTS LESSON 8

The Gospel to Rome (Acts 26-28)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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

“Almost you persuade me to become a Christian” (Acts 26:28). Welcome to our study of the last three chapters in the Book of Acts—chapters 26, 27, and 28. Here Paul is now going to reach his ultimate God-given goal of taking the Gospel before kings (all the way to Caesar himself). As Paul is preparing to go to Rome (Acts 26-27), there are many practical lessons that we can learn along the way. For example, in Acts 26:2 Festus wants Agrippa to hear Paul, mainly because he is too embarrassed to write to Caesar without any real reason for sending Paul. Paul, however, responds in a beautiful way concerning Christ. Notice Acts 26:2—“I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews.” Paul was happy to stand before King Agrippa in order to give an answer regarding Christianity. This teaches us a powerful lesson about how we, too, should be happy to speak out about Jesus. Paul was happy to speak out about Christ because Christ had given Paul true happiness and true joy in life. Paul had much to say about joy. In Philippians 4:4 he said, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” Paul had a reason to rejoice, and he wanted to tell others about it. The Bible says, “Happy is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly” (Ps. 1:1). Since Paul’s life had been given new meaning and purpose, he had found happiness. Thus, he was happy to speak about Jesus. Are we that way? Are we really happy to tell others about Christ? When someone asks us about living the Christian life, or about what we believe, or about Jesus and the church, does it embarrass us? Do we shy away and say, “You better ask someone else about that”? Or, do we stand up and say, “I would be happy to tell you why I am a Christian”? We do need to be ready always to give an answer to those who ask us about our faith (1 Pet. 3:15). But that ought to be done with joy so that we can show others that Christ living in us is the best life.

In Paul’s defense before Agrippa (Acts 26:4-5), he appeals to his own well-known character among the Jews. He says, in essence, “The Jews know me. They have known how I’ve lived. My reputation speaks for itself.” Paul then appeals (Acts 26:6-7) to the promise made to the fathers. He says, “This is what was promised to the fathers. It was given to Abraham in Genesis 12:2 that ‘in you all nations would be blessed.’” That same promise was made to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-14 (“I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever”). “This is the promise that God made to the fathers,” says Paul. Paul then says that the power of God to raise the dead can be seen. It can be seen through Elisha. It can be seen through Lazarus. And it can be seen through Jesus, because with God all things are possible. Paul then reminds the king of his [Paul’s] former life. He says, “You are trying to accuse me. But look at me. At one time I was just like you.” In verses 9-11 he says, “I used to persecute the church. I wreaked havoc upon it. But now, since I have been converted [vss. 12-17], I have changed my life. I am a new man. I have hope in Jesus—the hope that the Gospel brings.”

Paul's defense is based on Scripture. It is based on undeniable truths that even the Jews themselves knew. As Paul begins to talk to Agrippa, we see in these verses a lot about the purpose and power of preaching. In Acts 26:18 Paul said that the Gospel was to "open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith." Here is Paul's purpose in preaching the Gospel—to help people receive forgiveness of sins and to open their eyes. Their spiritual eyes had been darkened by sin. Christ, and the preaching of the Gospel, can open people's eyes today. The Gospel is what offers forgiveness of sins, and is what creates faith in people who live according to the will of God. So Paul mentions here the purpose and power involved in preaching the Gospel. Remember that the Word of God is living and powerful (Heb. 4:12). It is the Word that is able to save our souls (Jas. 1:21). Unlike the grass that withers and the flower that wilts, the Word of the Lord endures forever (1 Pet. 1:25).

As Festus converses with Paul, in Acts 26:24 he says, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!" To some people, being a Christian may seem like sheer insanity. To such people, the Christian life looks like a "mad life." Paul could have "had it all" in Judaism. He could have been one of the "top guns" in Judaism, yet he gave it up to follow Christ. He is being persecuted, and his life is being put on the line. Why? It looked like madness to these people—denying self in order to live for Jesus, as opposed to living in the lusts of the world. But in actuality, becoming a Christian frees us. It is the only life that can put us in our right mind. In Mark 5:15 we see a man who was possessed by many demons. He cut himself, and was so strong that no one could chain him. He spent his time amidst the cemeteries and mountains. The Bible says that when that man had his demons cast out of him as a result of having come in contact with Christ, he was finally for the first time "clothed, and in his right mind." Christianity is not pure insanity. Rather, it is the only way in this life for us to think clearly. In Haggai 1:5-7, Haggai said to a people who had been putting themselves before God, and who had been building their own paneled houses while the temple of God lay in ruins, "Consider your ways!" Each of us must do the same thing as a Christian. We must look to ourselves to see if we are living the life that God wants us to live.

Now I want to turn your attention to Acts 26:25. Festus has just accused Paul of being mad. Paul could have responded in several different ways. But instead he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason." The writer of Proverbs said, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1). How true that is. Paul could have blistered Festus for his ungodly life. He could have spoken against him, and could have offered a retort in some other way. Instead he said simply, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason." How true that is. As Christians, we do not need to respond with unkind words. Instead, we must "let our speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6). We need to speak in such a way that it will cause people to want to hear more about the Gospel of Christ.

Now I would like to turn your attention to one of the saddest verses in the Book of Acts, and maybe even in the entire Bible itself. Look at Acts 26:28. Agrippa has heard the message of God, and has seen Paul prove it from Scripture. He has shown that the Jewish fathers approved of the message, and that his own life did as well. But Agrippa said, "Almost you persuade me to become a Christian" (Acts 26:28). Paul responded by saying, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains." Agrippa was a man who was "almost" converted to the Gospel of Christ. How sad that is. How many people do you know who have "almost" obeyed the Gospel? Do you know what one of the saddest songs in Hell's

chorus is going to be? “I ‘almost’ became a Christian.” “I ‘almost’ dedicated my life to the Lord.” “I ‘almost’ gave up the sin that had such a stranglehold on me. I heard the message preached. I knew it was right. I was motivated to obey. And I ‘almost’ did.” The road to Hell will indeed be paved with good intentions. We need to stop saying “almost” and simply get right with God. We need to say, “Let us do the will of God! Now is the accepted time. Let’s obey God’s will!” God is pleased only with those who obey Him. In Matthew 7:21, Jesus said, “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.” Jesus asked a haunting question in Luke 6:46—“Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?” The Bible tells us in Hebrews 5:8-9 that Jesus is the Author of eternal salvation “to all those who obey Him.” So, as we think about Agrippa’s response, we can see how it is one of the saddest cases of non-conversion. Are you like Agrippa? Have you heard the Gospel and have known for a long time that you ought to obey it? Maybe you have understood that the Gospel is the right way, but things have been getting in your way. We need to lay aside every sin that so does so easily ensnare us and run with endurance the Christian race (Heb. 12:1-2). Whatever is getting in your way, or whatever is keeping you from saying “altogether” instead of “almost,” you need to remove from your life. Get it out of the way, so that you can be a child of God.

In Acts 27, Paul is now going to be sent (with Agrippa’s consent) by ship to Rome itself. In Acts 27 we see that some difficulties arise. There is a storm that comes upon the ship. The ship is carrying such a heavy load that it does not appear as if the ship will survive the storm. Some of the crew members are getting discouraged. But Paul knows that he must go to Rome, and he trusts God to get him there. If you want to see Paul’s great faith, look in Acts 27:25 in regard to what Paul says to the men on the ship. He says, “Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.” Just a few verses earlier, Paul had seen in a vision that God was going to deliver them from this trouble, and that He was going to take care of them. Paul thus says, “Take heart. Be of good cheer. Don’t worry. I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.” Oh, how we need that kind of faith today—the faith to say, “God said it, and that settles it. The Bible says that if I do this, I am going to be right with God. Thus, I am going to live that way.” Our faith is the victory that we have. In 1 John 5:4 we read, “This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” Faith is produced by reading or hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Faith is something that is substantial, because it is based on evidence (Heb. 11:1). Without faith like this, it is impossible to please God because “he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). We need to have the same attitude that Paul had. We need to say, “God said it, and I believe that is the way it is going to be.” God said that if we live faithfully before Him, He will give us a home in Heaven. John wrote, “This is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life” (1 Jn. 2:25). God said that if we will be faithful unto death, He will give us a crown of life (Rev. 2:10). Thus, in Acts 27:26-44 we see how God cared for Paul and all those who were shipwrecked with him. We also learn that God will care for us when our lives seem to be shipwrecks. Paul’s ship had wrecked, and people were tossed into the ocean. But even in the midst of that turbulent ocean, God cared for Paul and all of those who were with him. During the turbulent times and the difficulties in our lives, when there seem to be so many problems, we need to remember that God took care of Paul, and that God has said that He will take care of us, too. Listen to Hebrews 13:5-6—“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” God has promised not to leave us or forsake us. And He has promised that in our times of need, He will help us. Remember Hebrews 2:18—“In that

He Himself [Jesus] has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted." Jesus is our perfect example. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that He was tempted "in all points as we were, yet without sin." His example, and the faith that we have in Him, can lead us through the difficult times. Do you know what will help you the most in times of trouble? In times when difficulties are occurring, and when trouble is appearing in your life, you need to ask yourself, "Am I doing as much as I can to seek first the kingdom?" (Mt. 6:33). If we are, then we are promised that all things will be taken care of, and that God will provide for us. Romans 8:28 says, "All things work together for good to those who love God." Revelation 2:10 tells us, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." So, like the apostle Paul, we need to trust in God.

In Acts 28 Paul is taken safely to the Island of Malta, where he finds himself putting wood on a fire. A viper bites Paul, but Paul does not die. He casts off the viper, and the bite does not even affect him. The people see that great miracle occur (Acts 28:3-6), and they are amazed. They want to hear more about what Paul has to say because of this miracle. Miracles were never given for self-gratification. They were not intended to make people feel better. That may have been a by-product of certain miracles, but the purpose of miracles in the Bible was to be like a big, flashing sign that said, "**This** is God's spokesman; listen to him!" Mark 16:18-20 and Hebrews 2:3-4 inform us that miracles were intended to confirm the word of God's spokesmen. In the first century, people did not have a bound copy of the Bible. So, imagine that there were two people who stood up to speak. Both of them said, "I have a message from God." But the messages were different. How would you know which one was right? If one man had, as it were, a big sign pointing toward him because he could do miracles, then he could confirm that God was working through Him because of the miracles he performed. Today, of course, miracles have ceased. We are no longer living in the age of miracles. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 that miraculous knowledge, tongues, and prophecies will cease when that which is perfect has come, at which time that which is "in part" will be done away with. What is "the perfect"? If we can understand what "the perfect" is, then we will be able to understand that such miracles as prophecies and speaking in tongues have been done away with. We know that in the New Testament there were several things mentioned as being "perfect." Jesus Himself was perfect (Heb. 4:15). He lived a perfect life. But by this time, Jesus had already come and returned to the Father. What else, then, is mentioned as being perfect? The Word of God also is mentioned as being perfect. In fact, the exact word used for "perfect" in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 also is used in James 1:22-25 to describe the New Testament ("the perfect law of liberty"). What was the purpose of miracles? They were intended to confirm God's Word. When the Word was finally given to us in its fullest form, it became self-confirming. We can look inside the Word of God and know that it is true. We can prove it by the evidence we have. So, when the New Testament was given—when the last words were penned and given to mankind—miracles came to an end. The only ones who had the ability to pass on miracles were the apostles. When they died, that power was lost. So, miracles proved to the people on Malta that God's spokesman was there. And, as we read through the New Testament, miracles proved that what has been given to us has been given by God.

Now, I want you to turn your attention to Acts 28:23. In verses 10-22 we see Paul arriving in Rome. He was given a place to stay, and began getting ready to appear before Caesar. Acts 28 contains some of the last words we have about the apostle Paul. So, look in Acts 28:23. "When they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening." There are several pertinent passages contained in this passages that we today can understand. For example, it is obvious that the apostle Paul believed that the kingdom of God was a pres-

ent reality at that time. That is so different from what some people think today. They think that the kingdom is not really here, and that there will eventually be a Rapture and a thousand-year reign by Christ on Earth. Then God will set up His kingdom. But the kingdom was already set up in the first century. How do we know that? Mark 9:1 tells us. Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power." Either we have some really old disciples running around, or the kingdom came in the first century. The truth is that it **did** come! In Colossians 1:13 Paul said that some had been transferred "from the power of darkness and conveyed into the kingdom of the Son of His love." What is the kingdom? The kingdom is the church. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." The church and the kingdom are synonymous. When was the church established? In Acts 2:47 we learn that the Lord "added to the church daily those who were being saved." So yes, the kingdom is here.

But look what else Paul said. He preached about the kingdom, about Jesus, about the Law of Moses, and about the prophets all day long. He had enough material from the Old Testament to prove to these people that the Old Law was not going to last forever. In Jeremiah 31:31-34 God said that the day would come when He would "establish a new covenant with the of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt." God said that He would make a new covenant, under which He would forgive their sins and remove their iniquities. Even the Old Law promised that a new covenant was coming. The writer of the Book of Hebrews commented on Jeremiah 31:31-34 when he wrote in Hebrews 8:13, "In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." So the Old Law is not God's law for us today. Jesus can be seen from the Law of Moses. How? Deuteronomy 18:18-22 tells us that Jesus is the Great Prophet Who is greater than Moses. Christ can be seen through the prophets, who prophesied that a Messiah was coming Who would set up a kingdom that could never be destroyed (2 Sam. 7:14-15). So Jesus could be proved to be the Messiah by using the Old Law.

Now notice Paul's statements in Acts 28:30-31. "Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him." Isn't it wonderful to see Paul's mission unfolding? God promised Paul that he would preach before kings, Gentiles, and the house of Israel (Acts 9:15). Here we see Paul in the center of the then-known world (Rome) preaching the Gospel. He is preaching about the kingdom, and is not being forbidden by anyone. People are coming to Paul and are learning the truth about God's Word. How important it is for us as Christians to live the way God wants us to live. We need to make sure that we are giving ourselves fully to the cause of Christ. Are we really dedicating ourselves to the Lord like we ought to? Are we really putting the kingdom first? Are we doing the things of which God would approve? If not, then we need to make some serious changes. If, as a child of God, I am not living the way I ought to, then I need to repent. I need to pray to God to ask for forgiveness. In Acts 8 we learn from the case of Simon that a Christian can so sin after becoming a child of God that he or she can be lost. Simon the sorcerer had heard and obeyed the Word of God. He was baptized. But shortly after that, he (as a magician) saw a real miracle at the hands of the disciples. He therefore tried to buy the gift of God with money. Peter said to him,

"Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not

right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you" (Acts 8:20-22).

Simon then said "Pray for me that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me." Peter did pray for him, and Simon had his sin problem taken care of. But Simon was lost in his sin, and his money was going to perish with him (Acts 8:20-21). If you have sin in your life, and if you know that there are things that are not right—things that are causing you to not live your life as you ought to be living it—you desperately need to make those things right before it is too late. Think about some people who did not make it right, and who let things get in the way. Many times people let worldliness get in the way of them doing the will of God and going to Heaven. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) are perfect examples. They had some property, and sold the land. While they had the money, it was theirs to do with as they wished. But they came to the apostles and lied. They said that they had sold the land for a certain price, when, in fact, they had kept back part of the money for themselves. They both died on the spot—lost over such a foolish matter. Think about the rich young ruler in Mark 10. He came to Jesus and said, "Good Teacher, I know You are from God." Jesus said, "No one is good but God." The ruler wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus said, "Keep the commandments." The ruler said, "I have done that from my childhood." Jesus then said, "Go sell all you have and give the money to the poor; then follow Me." The Bible says that the ruler went away sorrowful because he had many goods. That man let his riches and treasures keep him from going to Heaven. Think about the foolish man in Luke 12:15-21. He had a great crop come in. He talked to himself and said, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years. Take it easy. Drink and be merry." But God said to him, "You fool, this very night your soul will be required of him. Then whose goods will those be that you have acquired?" In Luke 12:21 Jesus said, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." The greatest thing you could ever do if you are a Christian is to live the way God wants you to live. That is the **only** way to live.

If you are not a child of God, the Book of Acts declares to you the need to obey the Gospel. As you look at the Book of Acts, you can see that it is a book of conversions. It is a book that teaches us how people became Christians. God went to great lengths to spread the Gospel then. And that same message is what needs to be heard today—the message that Jesus came to this Earth, lived a perfect life, was crucified on a cruel cross for the world's sin and died among men, was buried in a tomb, and was raised the third day. If we follow Him, we can have the hope of eternal life. Are you a child of God? Are you a Christian? If not, what is keeping you from becoming one today? The Bible teaches us that to become a Christian, we must first hear God's Word (Rom. 10:17). We must listen to what God has to say on the subject of salvation. We must go to the right source—the Bible itself. Once we have heard the Word, we must be convicted in our hearts—so much so that we put full confidence and belief in Jesus. In Acts 8, as Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch were going down the road, the chariot came to a body of water. The eunuch said, "Here is water? What hinders me from being baptized?" Philip then said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may" (Acts 8:35-37). So, we must believe that Jesus is the Son of God. We also must repent and change our ways. In Acts 3:19 we are told to "repent and turn again, that our sins may be blotted out." Then we must confess the name of Jesus. In Matthew 10:32-33 Jesus said, "Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." And yes, we must be baptized in water for the forgiveness of sins. Acts 2:38 records, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." May the Book of Acts encourage us to live every day for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST is brought to you by loving, caring members of the church of Christ. The McLish Avenue church of Christ in Ardmore, Oklahoma, oversees this evangelistic effort. For a free CD or DVD of today's broadcast, please write to:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

**607 McLish Ave.
Ardmore, OK 73401**

You may call **580-223-3289**. Please visit us on the web at www.thegospelofchrist.com. We encourage you to attend the church of Christ, where "the Bible is loved and the Gospel is preached."

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR ACTS LESSON 8 (CHAPTERS 26-28)

1. Before whom, according to Acts 26:1-2, did Paul appear after having appeared before Festus?
2. According to Acts 26:2, what feelings did Paul have about his appearance before this man?
3. What assessment of this man did Paul make in Acts 26:27?
4. What response did this man make to Paul's presentation, according to Acts 26:28?
5. What important promise was made to King David in 2 Samuel 7:12-14?
6. What past sins of his own did Paul discuss in Acts 26:9-11?
7. According to Acts 26:18, what were three purposes for the sending of the Gospel?
8. How is the Word of God described in Hebrews 4:12?
9. According to Isaiah 40:8 and 1 Peter 1:25, how long will God's Word endure?
10. Of what did Festus accuse Paul in Acts 26:24?
11. In Acts 26:25, how did Paul respond to Festus' accusation?
12. What does Colossians 4:6 admonish Christians to do?
13. What does Hebrews 12:1 admonish us to do?
14. According to Hebrews 5:9, who is Jesus?
15. What happened in Acts 28:3-6 that caused the people of the Island of Malta to pay special attention to Paul and his teachings?
16. According to 1 Corinthians 13:10, when will miracles cease?
17. What is "the perfect" discussed in 1 Corinthians 13:10?
18. About what is James speaking in James 1:25 when he mentions "the perfect law of liberty"?
19. What was the purpose of miracles in the first century?
20. Why do we today not have access to, or need, miracles?
21. In Jeremiah 31:31, what did God promise to do?
22. What does Mark 9:1 tell us about the kingdom of God being in existence today?