

Acts 29 Series
The Holy Spirit Still Saves
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We are presently studying the book of Acts and giving a special focus to the ministry and acts of the Holy Spirit in the early church. Even though there are only 28 chapters to the book of Acts we have entitled this series **Acts 29 because the empowering work of the Holy Spirit continues through God's people today.**

The works of the Holy Spirit did not stop or decline as the book of Acts closes in chapter 28. The Holy Spirit is still doing his amazing work in the earth through God's people. **We are now living in the days of Acts 29.**

- **The Holy Spirit still empowers people like he did in the book of Acts**
- **The Holy Spirit still gives supernatural courage and makes people brave**
- **And - The Holy Spirit is still saving people all over the earth**

Today we are looking at Acts **chapters 9 thru 11**. These chapters reveal the deep struggle the Jewish people had in accepting Jesus as the Messiah and then also accepting the fact that the gentiles could be saved without converting to Judaism and observing their laws.

Chapter 9 begins with the story of Saul's conversion. His name was later changed and he became the Apostle Paul. Before his conversion he was a very sincere and devoted Jew. He was part of the religious group called Pharisees that adhered to the letter of the law.

His story reveals the truth that a person can be sincere but also sincerely wrong. You can be sincere in what you are doing but that doesn't make it right.

- Many people of other faiths are just as sincere as me – but that sincerity won't get them to heaven. They are sincerely wrong.

Saul was sincere in believing the followers of Jesus were deceived and dangerous and he felt he was doing God a favor by trying to wipe out the Jesus people or the **people of The Way** as they were known. So, he set out on a quest to arrest and put in jail and even kill all the Christians he could find.

We first hear of Saul at the stoning death of Stephens in Acts 7 & 8.

Acts 8:1-3 And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

Saul was the great persecutor of the early church. People were afraid of him. He was tearing families apart and wreaking havoc. Yet God was able to save him.

Read Acts 9:1-19 – Put up picture as I read the passage 

1. No one is beyond God's reach and saving power.

Saul was the least likely candidate for salvation. People most likely thought he was way beyond God's saving power. I'm sure they felt God could never love someone who ruthlessly persecuted Christians and had them killed. Yet God encountered him and turned him around.

What a powerful lesson for us today. Think of the greatest enemy of Christianity today. Muslim Radicals, ISIS warriors cutting off the heads of Christians.

God is still reaching the Saul's of our day and turning them into evangelists.

STORY

I read a story of an ISIS fighter who enjoyed killing Christians who is now following Jesus. A YWAM worker in the Middle East was contacted by this ISIS fighter. The ISIS fighter known for his brutal killing of many Christians has converted to Christianity after dreaming of a man in white who came to him and said, 'You are killing my people.' And he started to feel really sick and uneasy about what he was doing. "The fighter said just before he killed one Christian, the man said, 'I know you will kill me, but I give to you my Bible.' The Christian was killed and this ISIS fighter actually took the Bible and began to read it. In another dream, Jesus asked him to follow him and he was now asking to become a follower of Christ and to be disciplined."

This story of Muslims converting to Christianity after seeing Jesus in a dream is becoming more common in the Middle East.

Testimony from Ryan Forbes..... Seemed beyond hope.....

Ryan Forbes Notes

Greeting

- In May of 2003 led the police on a high-speed pursuit from Achenbach's pastries to the center of Downingtown in about 12 minutes. Speeds exceeding 135 MPH.
- Spent late teens & early twenties using and abusing people, drugs, alcohol, and myself.
- I have been in and out of the Lancaster County Prison 7 times. Did 3 years of my life in a prison cell, and was also in SCI Camp Hill and SCI Forest.
- Considered by the New Holland Police as a bum a scumbag and a loser. I was told that I would never amount to anything, and that I would be dead by my late twenties.

Encounter

- June 15th 2003, on Father's Day of that year, had an encounter with God in my prison cell.
- Knew I had met The Lord. The name of Jesus, was the name that erupted from my heart.
- Liberated me from the prison cell – felt free in prison.
- Even after being released, went back to old people, places, and things.
- Got in trouble again. High speed chase through New Holland.
- Did state prison time. God did not give up on me. While in Camp Hill felt God say, "My son, you will preach to the multitudes."
- Got out of prison, fell back into drug addiction. Was suicidal. God encountered me in a bedroom at my dad's house – caught fire for God.
- 2008, on final day of 7 day fast – God shown up like lightning and broke drug addiction.

Today

- I have been delivered, and continue to be delivered from drug and alcohol addiction, anger, abuse.
- Married to my beautiful wife Caitlyn. Have two handsome sons Cayden & Cameron.
- Carry 2 BS degrees. Multiple certificates.
- Providing for my family and serving the Lord.

2. God loves every person, people group and class equally.

This is easy to say but prejudice and bias has been a struggle throughout the ages. One people group or class of people thinks it is more privileged than another and oppresses the other. Almost every nation has this built in bias in their culture.

For some it is based on religion, race, heritage or socio-economic position or political position.

In chapters 10 and 11 God helps Peter overcome a deeply held religious conviction that was hindering him from taking the gospel to the gentiles. Jews were not allowed to associate or eat with gentiles because of the Jewish dietary laws. They were afraid they might eat the wrong thing and become defiled and sin against God.

So, God gives Peter a vision of animals, reptiles and birds that gentiles ate but Jews were not allowed to eat. God tells Peter to kill and eat them.

It is hard for us to appreciate the struggle Peter had here. In the Old Testament law in Leviticus 11, God said don't eat and now he was saying it's ok to eat.

God was doing away with the dietary laws so the gentiles could be reached with the gospel. Gentiles didn't have to become Jews and observe the law to be saved.

Three times God gives him the same vision. It was the witness of three that helped Peter understand this was really God and not bad Pizza he ate last night.

- **This is huge and a turning point of evangelizing the gentile world.**

God is basically telling Peter not to consider Gentiles impure and then sends him directly to the gentile Cornelius' house to eat with him and share the good news of salvation with him.

This got him in trouble with the other apostles and Christian Jews until they realized that God had accepted and given the gentiles salvation and the Holy Spirit just like he did to the Jews.

The Jews still had and have a special calling and role to fulfil but Peter and the disciples now realized that God's salvation and love was just as strong toward all people groups.

As Peter gets this revelation he describes his new understanding of God's acceptance of people.

Acts 10:34-35 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

Whether you call it racism, prejudice, bigotry, cultural, social economic, or gender bias it is all wrong.

The Bible is very clear, in Christ there is no favoritism or elite group. He simply looks for those who fear him and follow his ways. Not skin color or anything else.

Galatians 3:26-28

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

There is no room for prejudice or bias among races, ethnic groups, social classes or between men and women. **We are all equal and valued before God.**

Once they understood this the church began to grow rapidly with both Jew and gentile. **In Acts 11 we see a thriving church in Antioch, which became the center of the Christian movement.**

Followers of Jesus were first called Christians at Antioch. **“Christ Followers”**

Antioch is a model for healthy churches even today. In this passage and others, we see these traits. **The Church at Antioch:**

- **They encouraged each other to stay true to the Lord**
- **They disciplined people to spiritual maturity**
- **They were a sending church – with local and global missions**
- **They had team ministry – they shared the ministry**
- **They engaged in worship, prayer and fasting**
- **They embraced the prophetic and apostolic**
- **They helped the poor**

I think this is a good picture of Petra as well as many other churches in our area.

3. Jesus is good news. He alone can grant us forgiveness and eternal life.

The message of the early church was consistent and simple. The Kingdom of God is here and the way into the kingdom and to salvation is through faith in Jesus.

Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

John 14:6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Eph 2: 8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.

Neither Mohammed, Buddha, Mormonism or any other religion or our own good deeds can ever make us good enough or create a path for us to heaven. **There is only one way and one person and his name is Jesus.**

Conclusion:

Have you put your faith in that name? Have you surrender your life to Jesus and chosen to obey and follow him?

To be a follower of Jesus means you now live your life to please him in all you do.

