

Basic Doctrines In The Book Of The Acts

A Series of Radio Messages

by

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Jesus Christ In The Acts

Many people think the whole ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth was performed within the three-year period beginning with His baptism and ending at the cross. In the Gospels we read about His birth in Bethlehem. We read about His teaching and preaching. We can see the miracles and the arguments He had with various people, how He was 'betrayed by Judas, tried before Pilate, and was put on the cross. We study the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and find in it something that will encourage us and strengthen us to live in a certain way.

What we have in the Book of Acts took place after the crucifixion and this is what gives strength to our Christian faith. In the Book of Acts we learn that what Jesus began both to do and to teach while He was here on earth He continued to do in a much fuller way afterwards. The first chapter records how He spent forty days among His disciples showing them that He was really alive. "To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." In that period of time He was not specially trying to get them to agree on some system of ethics. He was not particularly arguing that there was a certain moral way of doing things. He was focusing their attention upon Himself in one particular thing . . . that He was really alive. This is tremendously important to us because the reality of Jesus Christ living after the crucifixion gives us confidence in the reality of heaven and all the things of God. In becoming a Christian and living the Christian life the first basic conviction we need is that Jesus is alive now. When we have that in mind, it means we are going to be alive when this world is over. It also means that wherever we are there is also the Lord Jesus Christ.

Suppose there is a Christian walking down the street with another man. As they talk together the other man might think he is with one person. The Christian who is spiritually aware of things knows he is walking with two persons. He is walking with his neighbor, but he is also walking in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ", because the Lord Jesus Christ is actually alive. Jesus not only showed Himself alive but He was speaking to them of things pertaining to the kingdom of God. He was talking to them about a way of life in which the living God has an actual part in the inward consciousness of the person. When they asked Him whether He would at this time restore the kingdom to Israel, He told them it was not for them to know the times or the seasons but He gave them this promise: "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me."

The first thing the Book of Acts shows us about the Lord Jesus Christ is that He took special pains to make sure His people would believe that He was actually alive. This leads us to the second thing that we find in this book. We read in the ninth verse of the first chapter, "When he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." We are living in the very kind of world out of which He was taken. Any time we look up into the sky and see the clouds we are to be reminded of the day He was taken up and a cloud received Him out of their sight. We need to have this definitely in mind because of what comes later. "While they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said . . . this same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." When a person is a Christian what is he thinking about? He is thinking that Jesus Christ is alive. He is thinking that Jesus Christ is coming again into this world . . . right here where the clouds are, where the people are, where the Mount of Olives is. In other words, His second coming is a reality.

There are several other things mentioned in the Book of Acts that the Lord Jesus Christ did after He was taken away. We find at the end of the second chapter, "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." The language could have said, "God did this." But it is worded, "The Lord." This gives

us strong reason to think that this refers to the living Lord Jesus Christ calling people unto Himself. In chapter three we have the case of Peter and John being used to heal the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. Peter said in verse sixteen, "His name [speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ] through faith in his name hath made this man strong whom ye see and know. Yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all." Of course we could say that this was done just in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as if it were by memory, but I think that the meaning of it is deeper than that. It means that the living Lord Jesus Christ would do this very thing.

In chapter seven we have the story of the trial and stoning to death of Stephen. Speaking of Stephen we read, "But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." The Christian needs this in His consciousness. We need to know that right now, wherever we are, the Lord Jesus Christ is alive, standing at the right hand of God. This is made even stronger when we come to the eighth and ninth chapters. This is the story of the Apostle Paul. While Paul was traveling on the Damascus road suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven. He was traveling on a highway just like the highway you and I travel on. Suddenly there was a light from heaven. "He fell to the earth and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." The Apostle Paul is introduced in one blinding moment into the whole strength of the Christian faith – the living Lord Jesus Christ. We know that from that moment on the Apostle Paul was a believer. This did not mean Paul changed his mind about some ways of doing things. Paul did not decide to live differently than he had lived before. It was not a matter of comparing one person's ethics with another person's ethics. He did not come to the end of a long argument about the reality of God. What actually happened was that as Paul was travelling along the Damascus road suddenly he was confronted with the blinding truth that Jesus of Nazareth was alive. It affected Paul in such a way we hear his response, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Later on in the same chapter Ananias went to him, and said, "The Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." Throughout this Book of the Acts we find that the very essence of Christian faith, what gives it its strength, is our personal conviction that Jesus is alive.

The God of The Acts

The Book of the Acts teaches that God is a living God. When Paul was speaking to the Greeks at Mars Hill in the city of Athens, he made it a point to say that God does not dwell in temples made by hands. God is not the kind of person we can shut up in a church. We often have the idea that if we want to worship God we must go to church. Little children think that if they go into the church they are going into the presence of God. Even when we older people go into a church sanctuary we cannot help but feel we are in the presence of God. Perhaps that is one reason why churches are built the way they are and why they are furnished the way they are. Some of them have stained glass windows in order to give us an impression that this is an unusual situation and we are now to be brought into the very presence of God. We get the idea that God is somewhere in that sanctuary and until we get into a church we cannot talk to God. The Book of Acts does not hold that view at all. The Book of Acts would say immediately that God does not dwell in temples made by hands. God does not especially live in the church building. It is not when we go into the beautiful sanctuary of the church that we come into the presence of God. We were in the presence of God while we were getting ready to go to church. We were in the presence of God when we woke up in the morning. We are in the presence of God all day long. We are in the presence of God on Monday just as much as on Sunday. We are in the presence of God when we are driving our car in the traffic just as much as when we are sitting in a pew in the church sanctuary. There is nothing wrong about being in church to worship God. But that is not necessarily where we will find Him.

Paul said that God did not need sacrifice that we might bring, since He owns everything. He does not need our silver and gold. We often associate the idea of going to church with the thought that we are going to make an offering to something. Chances are that we give more money away freely at that time than we do at any time. We spend more money elsewhere, but all the money we spend, no matter how foolishly we spend it, is always with the idea that we are going to get something out of it. When we put our money in the offering plate, there is, for a good many people, the feeling, "Well that's the last of that," as if that were all there was to it. Out of that comes the idea that I am giving something to God. It is entirely a misunderstanding. God in Himself does not need a penny of my money. As far as I am concerned, I need to give to the Lord's work for my sake. This comes to our minds when we remind ourselves that He does not need our sacrifice, He does not need our silver or our gold. God is the maker of heaven and earth, the maker of all things. When Paul was speaking to the pagan people in Athens he told them that God had not left Himself without witness and that He had given us fruitful seasons and all things to enjoy. The Book of Acts would claim that all the providence that surrounds us in nature by which we are benefited comes from a kind and benevolent God. Also when he was talking to those Greeks about God, Paul pointed out that God was the ruler of the nations, that He is sovereign over all nations. He is the God of nature and He is the God of history.

When Paul was in the synagogue in the city of Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 12) he referred to God as the God of our fathers. At that time the Apostle Paul was speaking to Jewish people, to those who stood in the tradition of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David, those who had the Old Testament Scriptures in their hands. According to the Book of Acts, the God that Paul and Peter and Stephen believed in was the God of the Bible, the God of Moses, the God of Abraham, the God of David and the God of Daniel.

Certain things are reported in the Book of Acts that God did. For instance, He raised Jesus Christ from the dead. This makes Him the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. When a person says he worships God and believes in God, if he is talking in the language of the Book of Acts, that means that he believes in the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead He will raise us from the dead because God is that kind of a person. Not only did God raise Jesus Christ

from the dead, but He took Christ into His own presence. The Book of Acts tells us that the Son of Man is standing now at the right hand of God. This gets a little closer to us because as long as I talk about God being a living being, the creator, the sovereign one and the God of history, He is a long way off. I think about living down here on earth and then I think about heaven, and it is hard for me to make a connection between the two. But in Jesus Christ that connection was made. Back in the Old Testament days Jacob saw a ladder from earth to heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ said that Nathaniel would see in Jesus Christ the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man. This is a reference to the angels of God, ascending and descending upon that stairway that Jacob saw. In Jesus Christ we see earth and heaven at the same time. It is even more profound when we think about the body of Jesus of Nazareth being taken up there. The Book of Acts teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ ascended into the very presence of God where He is now.

There are certain other things told in this book about God that are of interest to us. For instance, Paul said that God calls all men everywhere to repent. This is not only that God made all men and overrules in nature to provide for all men and to guide all men, :but person to person, God to man, God calls on men to repent of themselves. In another place Peter made a point of saying that God is no respecter of persons. God is the creator of all men the maker of all men, the keeper of all men, He is the judge, and He calls on men to repent. This is the God who chose Paul to be an apostle. If he chose Paul to be an apostle, he could choose me. He could choose you. He could give us an assignment, a work to do. This is the God who answers prayer and we find in the Book of Acts that people came to Him, prayed to Him and they got answers to their prayers. This is the God who pours out His Holy Spirit as He did on the Day of Pentecost into the hearts of those who believe in Him. This is the God who works miracles to endorse the gospel. These wonders are done that people might be impressed with His servants as they go about over the world preaching. This is the God who brings His Will to pass and who will work all things out the way He wants to. He told Paul at the time of the great storm at sea that Paul need not be afraid of what was going to happen. God intended that Paul should come before Caesar, and to Rome he would go. The storm would not be able to destroy him. In all these ways we get the impression that this God in the Books of Acts is the living God, and one in whom we can put our full trust. We can stand as the Apostle Paul did and say as he said, "I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." This is the God of the Bible. This is the God of the Book of Acts. And this is our God, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Witnesses Unto Jesus Christ

Throughout the history of the Christian gospel there have always been some people who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Have we ever stopped to think what kind of people they are? What sort of people would they be that would become witnesses unto Jesus Christ? We can get some idea about this when we look in the Book of Acts. One thing we notice is that Christians are of no particular nationality. They do not belong to anyone particular class of people. Christians are not just the rich and not just the poor. Christianity is not the educated alone, and it is not for the uneducated alone. It is not for laboring people and it is not for the people who own property and who are in control. It is for anybody and everybody, whosoever will. Yet Christians have certain characteristics. Although we say on the one hand that whosoever will may come, we will have to admit that on the other hand not everybody comes. There are certain conditions under which people are called.

In chapter two, when the Day of Pentecost was fully come they were all with one accord in one place. These people were blessed with the coming of the Holy Spirit and we are inclined to say that God would give the Holy Spirit to anybody. But notice that while God would give the Holy Spirit to anybody, He does not give it to everybody under any conditions. There will be certain conditions. The conditions here are with one accord in one place. Of course they were also disciples of Jesus Christ. They were people who had confidence in Jesus Christ, and who wanted to learn about Jesus Christ. These were such disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ as could unite in fellowship, in prayerful waiting. They were people who obeyed guidance that had been given to them. This is so very important. If you and I would like to be blessed of God it will be necessary to be in that kind of a frame of mind that we will be obedient to guidance from above. It would bring us into fellowship with other people. We do not have to make up our mind to it. God will lead us and we will be together before God.

What are the circumstances or the conditions under which you can be led of God? Chapter three is the story of how Peter and John were used to heal the lame man at the Beautiful Gate. I want to draw your attention for a moment to Peter and John. "Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer." Peter and John were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Was any and every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ used for the healing of lame men? Would this have happened to ,anybody, anytime, anyplace? They went up together, into the temple at the hour of prayer. They were believers in Jesus Christ who went to church regularly. While they were going to the public worship of God in their regular way they were challenged by the sight of this man who was there before them in need. How did they respond? Peter was able to say to him, "Such as I have give I thee." Peter and John would never have had this opportunity to serve if they had not been going up to church that day to worship God at the regular time.

"As the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them." That would bring a lot of attention upon Peter and John. When Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, "Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this, or why look ye so earnestly on us as though by our own power or holiness we have made this man to walk?" Then he went on and told them it was through the Lord Jesus Christ. They were humble men, giving all praise to Jesus Christ. Certainly they had been used in a remarkable way to the glory of God, but Peter said, do you think that makes us any different from anybody else? Do you think we are any better than anybody else? This is something that God has done. Later, Peter was called into court and tried for what he had done. "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit said unto them . . . Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . . this is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved . . . When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they

were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus."

Peter and John were greatly used of God. They had just done a profound thing as a result of which some thousands of people joined the company and became believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. What kind of men were they? We know already that they were worshipping men. They went to church regularly. They went to church to pray. We know too they were humble men. When God blessed them they took no credit to themselves. They gave all the praise to God but they were bold men. When the public turned on them and they were brought into court and asked, How did you do this? They openly said, By the name of Jesus Christ. You rejected Him. You put Him on the cross but God made Him both Lord and Christ and there is no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved. These were the words of these humble Christians, standing before the counsel and it was an astonishment to people. How could these men be so bold and how could they be so strong? They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. They had had personal fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We are talking about what kind of people would be used to bear witness to Jesus Christ and we find it here. After the counsel was through with them, they told them never to preach again in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And they warned them that if they did preach they would punish them. "Being let go they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord" and prayed. In the prayer there was no animosity. There was no belligerence. They did not pray Almighty God to bring trouble and havoc upon the city. They prayed, "Now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word." That is all they asked for. They were prayerful, dependent upon God in crises and even though they had been wrongly treated and wrongfully accused they had no belligerence, no resentment, did not take anything out on anybody, but they did not give in. They just asked God to make them strong to preach. "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken and all were filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness." If you read on down to verse 32 of chapter 4, you find the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul. That kind of people were the people that were blessed. They not only were of one heart and one soul but when any of them had need, the others helped them out.

This is very important. I know that you could wish that your church would be strong, would have results in its personal testimony. Maybe you even feel for yourself that you would like to be a person whose personal testimony would count. Maybe you are trying to win people to come to church that they might be one with the Lord. Maybe you want to help people in Sunday School that they might learn about the Lord. Maybe in your own family you would like to help people. Will you think over the things we have been saying here? They were all with one accord in one place, and will you be minded in your heart to be agreeably-minded with people, to try and gain in fellowship with other people, a communion with other believing people? Will you remember how Peter and John went up to the temple at the hour of prayer, and will you make it a point to go to church regularly and prayerfully? When God does bless you, will you be quick to say it isn't you. that it is God that is doing it and give all praise and glory to God? If somebody were to challenge you about your doing, will you be bold to say that it is done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? If you are criticized, will you pray to God for help, help to be strong, to be kind, to be gentle? With reference to all other believers, will you be brothers? Will you try to help them? These are the conditions that will make you a useful and fruitful witness for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Opposition to the Gospel in The Acts

The purpose for the preaching of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is to seek and to save the lost. Any time we hear someone getting up to speak in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we will hear someone telling men that Christ Jesus has died for their sins. They now can come . to God who will forgive them and cleanse them and make them His own. This is being helpful to people. It is not asking them for anything, but giving them something. Should we expect that such preaching would be opposed? Would you think there would be reason why anybody should ever oppose evangelistic work when it is simply a straightforward invitation to all men everywhere to repent and to turn to God? Yet the fact is that the preaching of the gospel does meet with opposition. Even when you try to ask people to go to church, or try to encourage people to become Christians, there is opposition to what you are doing. All you want to do is to bring those people to God that they might be blessed and that they might be helped. But you will at times be criticized and you will have opposition to what you are seeking to do.

This is the way it was in the Book of Acts. We want to notice some of the kinds of opposition that came against the preaching of the Gospel. It begins as early as the fourth chapter where we read, "And as they (Peter and John) spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead." The priests were the teachers. The captain of the temple was the man in charge of the place of worship. The Sadducees were people who had special ideas about what the truth of God was. The high priest was the leading figure in the administration of worship among those people. What we actually have here are the powers that be in the religious situation. They were grieved that these preachers, Peter and John, taught the people. Were they afraid that if Peter and John preached, the people might not be satisfied with things the way they were, and they would want them different? The leaders did not want things any different than they were. So they made threats of punishment against Peter and John. They warned them that there would be reprisal of a sort; they would be in trouble if they continued preaching.

When Stephen the deacon was preaching (Acts 7), there were certain members of the synagogue of the libertines that were opposed to what he was preaching. All Stephen was doing was telling the people the things that God had done. You will read this in the sixth chapter, "Stephen full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people." Certain of the synagogue "were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake." They brought him into court, set up false witnesses, and accused him of disturbing the peace. Stephen got up quietly and made his defense, explaining according to the Scriptures that he was just telling them what the Bible itself said. These members of the synagogue (today we would call them members of the church) aroused mob violence against Stephen. They stoned Stephen to death.

What could happen here among us is that they would talk about us, criticize us and arrange to see to it that we do not get to teach a Sunday School class or have any part on any committees. They do not want us to have anything to do around the church. Why? Because in the course of what we were doing we were trying to tell somebody about the things of the Lord Jesus Christ. It does not happen to everybody. It will not happen every time, but such opposition can come to pass.

Saul had opposition in chapter eight. Saul was bitterly opposed to the Christians. They had never done him any harm, but because they were saying something different than he believed, it made him uneasy and he was opposed to them. He was a zealous religious leader and he brought the Christians to court. There are people today who take it on themselves to stop the preaching of the gospel. However, Saul became a changed man after he met the Lord Jesus Christ on the Damascus road. He believed that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God. He got up in the synagogue and preached it. Then the Jews at

Damascus sought to kill him. "After that many days were fulfilled the Jews took counsel to kill him: But their laying wait was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket." All that maneuvering to save a man's life which was being threatened because he was preaching the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can be glad that we live in a country where we are not in danger of our life if we preach the gospel. But we can be prepared for it. If we try to tell people that apart from the Lord Jesus Christ they would not be saved, we will find some people bitterly antagonistic as far as we personally are concerned.

In the 4th chapter we find another case of opposition. Peter had been moved of God to go into the house of Cornelius, a Gentile. There was to be no dealings between them, but God called on Peter to go into the house of Cornelius to tell them the Gospel. A Jew went into the house of the Gentile. When Peter returned and reported to the apostles and brethren in Judea that the Gentile received the word of God the Jews contended with him, saying, "Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised and didst eat with them." They had a social custom and the social custom made a difference between Jews and Gentiles. They did not criticize Peter for any spiritual reason, but because he did something that was socially unapproved. Even in our church life, our attitudes can be affected by our outside social relationships. We can be opposed by people who oppose us for personal reasons. That is what happened here.

King Herod killed James and arrested Peter because it pleased the Jews. Some people criticize preachers because it pleases certain people. Some criticize great evangelists because they know it wins approval from certain people. *Felix* knew Paul should not be in prison but it would please the Jews to have him there so he left him. Festus did the same thing. Later on we find that other people opposed. Elymus the sorcerer opposed Paul because he did not want his friend the deputy to become a Christian. The Jews were filled with envy because the Greeks believed in such large numbers and so many came to the apostles to believe. The Jews stirred up devout and honorable women, chief men of the city and the people who violently opposed the gospel. The silversmiths opposed the gospel because it was going to interfere with their making of idols. This opposition continued throughout the Book of Acts. The gospel will always run into opposition. The preaching of it, our teaching of it, our testimony in our home, our testimony among our friends, trying to do the things that please the Lord will run into opposition and criticism on every hand. That doesn't mean we stop it. It does not mean we are wrong. It does not mean that our testimony will not count. It just means we need the grace of God to strengthen us day by day.

The Holy Spirit in The Acts

A real Christian is never alone. He never carries any burden by himself. This is a part of Christian experience the world can never understand. A Christian believes in the living Lord Jesus Christ. It is not enough just to say that we believe in Jesus Christ as He lived in Palestine 1900 years ago. It is not enough to say that Christ is the one that the churches worship and the one that the Bible tells about. In order to have a real Christian experience one needs to understand and believe that the Lord Jesus is alive. He was raised from the dead. He has not died again. He is actually alive now. A Christian believes in God as Father. Of course he believes God is the creator of the heavens and the earth. He believes that God is sovereign over all; that He is the one who controls the nations. But the Christian also understands that God is his personal Father. He believes in the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. He understands that there is in his heart the very presence of God. This means that a real Christian is never alone. No one Christian ever stands as one; anyone Christian always stands as two. There is the Christian and there is the Lord. The Lord is with him. No two Christians ever meet and count that there are just two. When two Christians meet there are three. There are the two Christians and the Lord. If three Christians meet, it is not just three, there are four. There are three Christians and the Lord. This is New Testament truth and this is what we find in the Book of Acts.

We have seen what the living Lord Jesus Christ does for Christians. Now we will see what the Holy Spirit does for them. This is not just anybody and everybody in the world, but for real believers. This does not mean they are especially good people. It does not mean they have lived a long time or they have done a great deal. It is the people who have faith in the living Lord Jesus Christ. God has given to them in their hearts the personal presence of God in the person of the Holy Spirit. This is something that the world does not know, does not understand. No one can ever see this truth of the Holy Spirit with his eyes, hear it with his ears, or feel it with his hands. Yet the Book of Acts tells us that the Holy Spirit was given to the early church. He was promised in the Old Testament where we read that God said that He would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh. He was promised by John the Baptist who told the people who listened to him, "I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh . . . he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost." He was promised by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who said, "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." They were told to wait for the promise of the Father.

The Book of Acts tells us that the Holy Spirit came into this world to enter into the church on the Day of Pentecost. When He did so come He filled the people. Things happened to them that the world could never understand, but it made a difference in their conduct. For instance, when these Christians were put on the spot they could speak with power and with boldness. When Peter and John were brought into court and told that they should not preach, they stood up and told everybody there that the living Lord Jesus Christ was working with them and that He wanted them to be His witnesses. The people marvelled at the boldness of Peter and John, because they observed that these were not educated men. They were not highly cultured men, but they spoke with boldness and "they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." When Paul was talking about going to Jerusalem at a certain time in the latter part of the Book of Acts the Christians told him not to go because of what was going to happen. They were able to foretell the future because of the Holy Spirit. Paul himself said that everywhere the Spirit witnessed to him through the brethren of the troubles that should be ahead of him at Jerusalem.

The Holy Spirit in the hearts of these believers made , them charitable to each other. They shared their goods with one another as if they were brethren. What gave them this consciousness of belonging to each other was the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. Another place we read that the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit would show them the things of Christ and the

things of Christ would give them joy. All these things have to do with their personal experience.

The significance of the Holy Spirit being in the heart is even more than just the impression it made upon them. When the early church came together to decide whether or not the Gentiles would have to be circumcised in order to become Christians, they came to their conclusion and described it in this way: "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us." When they were gathered together in fellowship, counselling together, talking things over, arriving at a conclusion, they were doing this conscious of the presence of God among them. They were trying to understand what God would want them to do. The thirteenth chapter records that, "The Holy Spirit said to them. . . ." I do not think that means that they heard a voice out of the walls or ceiling. I think that means when they were united together in prayer to God and were meditating in the very presence of Almighty God there came in their hearts this truth. They began to realize they were being led inwardly to think this, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." The fourth verse follows with, "So they being sent forth by the Holy Spirit. . . ." In the sixth chapter when they were gathered together to elect the deacons we read that they were to choose men that were filled with the Holy Spirit. And afterwards in the 20th chapter of the Book of Acts when Paul was talking to the elders from the church at Ephesus, he said about them, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers." The story of Philip in the seventh chapter tells how the Holy Spirit led Philip to go to the chariot of the Ethiopian and to talk with him. In the sixteenth chapter when Paul and his company were trying to decide where to go to preach, they were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to go into Asia. When they assayed to go into Bythinia the Spirit suffered them not. Now here again how would the Spirit stop them? Would they see a ghost? Would there be something across the road that would stop them? No, when they were gathered together in prayer and were praying about the work of the Lord, they were inwardly led. In this instance they had to admit they had no liberty to go into Asia Minor and they had no liberty to go into Bithynia. Paul had a vision of the man of Macedonia who said Come and help us. When they talked together afterwards about that they were assured that they should go there.

So we see that the early church actually was guided in its policies and guided in its procedures by the Holy Spirit. This can mean something to you and to me. As we make our plans about going some place, or about doing something, perhaps teaching a class or making a talk somewhere, we can have in mind as surely as we believe in God, as surely as we believe in the living Lord Jesus Christ, we can count on it that there will be from within our own hearts a guidance and leading as to the things we should say and do. The same thing will be true in the matter of our praying. When we go to prayer we will be inwardly led by the Holy Spirit to pray for this, or that, for this person or that person, ask for this and ask for that. In other words you and I should be conscious of the fact that God Himself will come and live with us. This is what we learn in the Book of Acts about the indwelling Holy Spirit of God.

6

How People Become Christians

The Day of Pentecost was the beginning of what we call the Christian church. The great preacher was Peter, and on that day 3000 people were converted. When we look into the story as it is actually recorded in the Book of Acts in the second chapter we see that it was not quite as simple as it sounds. These 3000 people did not become Christians just because they heard Peter one time.

Let us consider these various aspects of the whole situation. The Day of Pentecost took place in the city of Jerusalem, the home of the Jews. Who are they? They are people who believe in God – the God of Abraham, Isaac, the God of the Old Testament and the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the God whom the Christians worshipped. Also, in the city of Jerusalem was the temple, the center of the worship of the Jewish nation. All the Jews came together to worship God in the temple in a special way. The Day of Pentecost took place after the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever the people of the community thought of Jesus of Nazareth and however the city of Jerusalem may have treated Him, there was very little happening in this small country of Judea that would not be known to everyone. They knew this rather remarkable and sensational preacher of Galilee called Jesus of Nazareth performed marvelous miracles. On occasion He fed as many as 5000 people under unusual circumstances. Again he fed 4000 people. Here is a man who is credited with raising the dead. A great many people had! been around when Lazarus came out of the tomb. Many of them did not believe in Jesus but they knew that Lazarus had been restored to life. There was also the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth. He had preached in the temple, on the streets, by the seashore. He had been preaching and teaching for three years, and He was not alone. He had a company of men with Him of whom twelve had been chosen to be apostles. Other disciples and women followed Him in a rather large company. These had gone about as a group of people witnessing and testifying that this Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the Son of God. Less than two months before Pentecost, within the same season of the year, had been the event which we called the Crucifixion. That was rather a big affair. They brought this man before Pontius Pilate and challenged Pontius Pilate to put Him to death for political reasons, accusing Him of being a traitor. The whole story was well known throughout the whole city of Jerusalem. Not only that but word had gone out about the resurrection. There might be any number of people who did not believe the resurrection, but it was widely reported that His body was never found. The report was given out that the soldier said somebody came and stole His body. Whether someone stole His body or whether He was raised from the dead the fact was that the tomb was empty and the people knew it. All these things are in the background in the city of Jerusalem.

Before the sermon was ever preached, these 120 disciples had been meeting in an upper room. Suddenly they had a remarkable spiritual experience and came out speaking in the language and the dialect of each person that was there. A hundred and twenty joyous witnesses proclaimed the wonderful things of God. A hundred and twenty people were talking about Jesus being alive and saying at the same time God has received us and God has come to dwell with us. Every man was telling this in such a way that every other person there heard this in his own language and in his own dialect. These people had been profoundly impressed with what was going on. When Peter preached there were 3000 converts. We can expect when people become Christians that something of the witness and the testimony of the church is involved. If a congregation in the local community has a history of having people turn to God, people having their lives changed, people who have had demonstrations of God answering their prayers, and they have talked about it, then all of those things in the community would have bearing on the individual who hears the gospel call to come to the Lord Jesus Christ. To hear someone say, "repent and believe and you will receive the Holy Spirit" would mean something to a person who has lived in a community where there is a strong group of Christian witnesses as there was in Jerusalem at that time.

In chapters three and four we too find another instance where a great many people believed. In the beginning of chapter four, the number of people that believed was 5000. Everything that was true about Pentecost, including the event of Pentecost, happened here. That must have been a very stirring and exciting thing in the city of Jerusalem. Then we come to the instance of the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate. It was doubtless now common knowledge about these believers. The Jewish community would have known about those Jews who believed that Jesus of Nazareth was alive and who claimed He was the Messiah. They would have understood who Peter and John were when Peter and John came up to the temple at the hour of prayer. When Peter and John were confronted by the lame man who was a symbol of the need of the world, Peter's classic statement was – "Silver and gold have I none." I cannot take care of you so far as this world is concerned. "Such as I have give I thee." I have confidence in God. "Rise up and walk;" Then he took him by the right hand, lifted him up and immediately his feet and bones received strength. He leaped and ran and praised God. This whole event was colorful and impressive and then we have Peter's answer to the people, do you look on us as if we caused this? He told them that the living Lord Jesus Christ whom they had crucified while He was here upon earth and whom God had now raised from the grave and had taken up into heaven and had made both Lord and Christ, that this is the One who had exercised Himself in the healing of the lame man. So they preached about the Lord Jesus Christ. In the fourth chapter we find that the Sadducees and the chief priests were grieved because they taught the people and preached the resurrection from the dead. Remember all that preaching, all that witnessing and testimony. would be backed up and enforced to the people by what had happened to the lame man. The number of men was about 5000. Where these people become Christians, there is a witness given to them. There is a report of something which God has done which is impressive. It inclines to win their confidence and urges them to put their trust in God that they too may share in this blessing.

When we come to chapter five we find a condition and a circumstance that is quite different. This is the story of Ananias and Sapphira. These two wealthy people came to make an offering for the poor people in the church and pretended it was all the money they received for a certain piece of property, but they lied. It was not all the money. They kept back part of the money, but they wanted credit for giving it all. Peter judged them, stopped them in their tracks, and asked them if it were not true that they were lying. He then challenged them to explain why they would lie to the Holy Spirit. As far as Peter and all the people were concerned, God was living with them. By lying Ananias and Sapphira showed they did not appreciate the fact that God was living with them. Peter confronted them in such a way that each of them died right there. This was an evidence of judgment upon hypocrisy. Later on in this same chapter we read, "Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." A great multitude of people became Christians. It does not tell us that they had gotten some new insight into the truth. It does not tell us that they had been argued with and been persuaded. It tells us that they had been affected in such a way that they committed themselves to the Lord of whom they had heard. We do not know how many of these people had been present at Pentecost or at the healing of the lame man. It all happened in the same city, among the same folks. What looked like a quarrel among these disciples suddenly became wisdom and humility of the apostles as they appointed the deacons to take care of practical events. This whole matter was solved in such a way as to eliminate controversy and contention. The people were tremendously impressed with this change. They may have wondered, is it real? Can you put your trust and confidence in it? Then they saw how Peter judged sin. The church itself repudiated evil. That is honor. That has integrity. That gains confidence. People decided to give themselves to the Lord, multitudes turned to the Lord, both men and women.

Chapter six presents another situation that developed inside the church. There was a difference of opinion about the way food was handed out to the poor people. The question arose as to whether the administration of charity was well done. Some people there thought their own particular friends and relatives were not receiving a fair share of the food and the supplies that were being handed out to those

who were in need. They were on the point of quarreling and murmuring about it. In a humble fashion they came out before everybody and invited them to elect their own deacons who would take care of the poor. The result of this was, "The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." What was it that caused the people to become Christians? There is no doctrinal description of their teaching. There is no theology set forth to show how they explained things. Chances are that what they had to say was just the same as they had been saying before. They were saying that God was real and Jesus Christ was His Son. God sent Jesus Christ, the Son, into the world to seek and to save the lost. He came to give His life a ransom for many; the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross was on behalf of sinners. Whosoever cometh to Him He will in no wise cast out. "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." This is the kind of thing they all said. This is the kind of thing they all taught. But just the saying and the teaching of this is not always enough to win a Christian. You can get the whole picture in mind and still may not be moved to actually commit yourself to Christ.

We find in chapter six a situation that did bring a great many to Christ. It was the handling of a situation in the church in such a way that there was no quarrelling. The apostles humbled themselves so that no one could take offense at them. They took no personal offense because of the criticism. They made a practical arrangement which would eliminate the chance of any oversight at all and they laid emphasis on spiritual things. The apostles told them, we will appoint these men that you elect to this particular office. We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. This saying pleased the multitude and in the crowd now is a recognition of the fact that this inward relationship with God is real. It actually works. It actually affects people. So a great company of priests were obedient to the faith.

In chapter eight we find a still different situation in which people become Christians. This was not in Jerusalem. This was in Samaria, a neighboring city. Philip, one of the deacons elected in chapter six, went down to Samaria and preached Christ unto them. Now the gospel was being taken outside the company of those who have heard the things of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was being taken to people who were not in the regular group of Israelites and Jews who worshipped God according to the revelation that was in the Scripture. These were people who do not understand so well and yet they have heard about these things. Philip went down and preached Christ unto them. The people paid heed to the things that Philip said because they had seen the miracles which Peter had done. So they put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ through Philip and both men and women were baptized.

A great number of people had now become Christians. How did these people become Christians? It is not that they did not hear the gospel in form and word. I am sure they heard the whole truth of the Lord Jesus Christ. They had heard everything that had to do with the fact that Christ Jesus died for sinners, to save those who put their trust in Him. But what moved them to act? What caused them to actually receive this and believe it to be true? Was it not the effectiveness of Philip's ministry? Was it not that people were actually changed by Philip's ministry. When the people heard and saw the things that Philip did, there was great joy in that city.

Toward the latter part of chapter eight is the account of the first one of three individual cases of people who became Christians. First was the Ethiopian. This man had come up to Jerusalem to worship. While the Ethiopian was on his way home, reading the Scriptures, the Spirit led Philip to go over and join himself to his chariot and begin a conversation. We might say that Philip just talked to a stranger, told him the gospel and the man believed. That is true and yet it is not all the truth. The Ethiopian was not a man just picked up at random. He was not just some stranger passing through. He was a man who believed in God. He had come up to Jerusalem to worship. He did not know the grace of God in Jesus Christ, but he understood that God was creator of the heavens and the earth. He understood the moral laws expressed in the Ten Commandments. He felt his personal responsibility to do the things that were pleasing in God's sight. He doubtless understood about the sacrifice for sins, but he did not know about Christ. We see that

while it is true that anybody can become a Christian, it is not exactly telling the whole truth to say anybody, anywhere, under any circumstances could be told in a few words the gospel and could immediately become a Christian. There is always a background. There is something that leads up to it. In the case of the Ethiopian his problem was ignorance. He did not know about Jesus Christ. He knew so much else. They told him about Jesus Christ and immediately he wanted to believe. He said, "What doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. He answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And they baptized him and he went on his way rejoicing.

A different circumstance is recorded in chapter nine. Saul the Pharisee was travelling on the highway when a light appeared from heaven and the Lord Jesus spoke to him. This was not going to happen to any man in the world. This was going to happen to a person with certain preparation. Who was Saul? To begin with he was a person who was born of parents who believed in God. He did not believe in Jesus Christ, but he believed in God. He was a man who tried to do the right thing. He was exceedingly zealous in all forms of his religion beyond the people of his own age. This is the man to whom the Lord appeared. This is not to say that everybody has to be like that, but in the matter of becoming a Christian oftentimes there is a preparation. People are actually brought to the point where they can become Christians.

Perhaps one reason I am saying this is that you and I might be more diligent in bringing people to the place where the Lord can actually deal with them. In the case of Saul his trouble of course was prejudice. He was just sure the Christians were wrong. As it turned out, he was wrong. He could not see it. No prejudiced person ever can. But God dealt with him. God sent Ananias to deal with him. Ananias came into his presence and called him Brother Saul. He was brought through into the glorious experience of being in Christ Jesus. After Ananias baptized him and he had received the Holy Spirit, "straightway he preached Christ in the synagogue, that He is the Son of God."

We read about another man in chapter ten. This man's name was Cornelius. He was a centurion in the Roman army. He was a good man. He prayed to God always and gave alms to the poor. He worshipped God. Then the message came to him to send for Peter and that Peter would tell him what he ought to do. Peter came and told him about the Lord Jesus Christ. "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." So Cornelius became a Christian. When he was listening to this, the Holy Spirit fell on all them that heard the word. All this brings to our minds some of the ways in which people came to be believers. It is not that everyone of us have to have the same kind of experience as this and yet it seems that those who come to be believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are people who already believe in God. They have some sense of responsibility to Him. Oftentimes they are people who are burdened with the feeling of their own doom and they cannot do anything about it. But they believe in God and they believe that God is alive and that He is real and can deal with them. These are the people to whom God showed the things of the Lord Jesus Christ.