

1990

Bible Lessons



**"Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord,
we are CHANGED" II Cor. 3:18**

ADULTS -- YOUNG PEOPLE

**Vol. 20, No. 3
July, Aug., Sept.
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Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

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Table of Contents

	Page
July 3 The Witness of Stephen, the First Christian Martyr	1
10 Philip Preaches the Gospel in Samaria	7
17 Peter and John's Mission to Samaria	11
24 Philip and the Man From Ethiopia	14
31 Christ Apprehends Saul	20
Aug. 7 Saul Preaching the Faith He Once Destroyed	24
14 Peter Ministers at Lydda and Joppa	28
21 Taking Heed to Our Spirit	35
28 The Call of Cornelius — Part 1	38
Sept. 4 The Call of Cornelius — Part 2	42
11 The Call of Cornelius — Part 3	48
18 Peter Gives an Account of His Visit to the Gentiles	52
25 Further Outreach and a Famine Foretold	56

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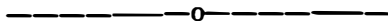
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Theme for Third Quarter, 1988

We are inspired in this series of lessons to continue our study of the Acts of the Apostles which show the functions and activities of the early morning Church of God. We will begin with the witness and martyrdom of Stephen and what followed. Here we will see arise to view what was at first to be a terror to the Church turned to be a great blessing. This was Saul, later known as Paul, and his persecution of the saints being transformed by his meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. We will study the ministry of Peter in Lydda, and Joppa, and Caesarea. There will be one side lesson in Number 8 on a subject that I have been so blessed in very recently, which I believe will prove very profitable to all. That will be a lesson on the kind of spirit that God wants us to have. We pray that the Spirit of God will bless each lesson for the spiritual edification of all.

—Leslie Busbee



July 3, 1988

THE WITNESS OF STEPHEN, THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR

Acts 7:14 Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.

15 So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers,

16 And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmore the father of Sychem.

17 But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,

18 Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.

19 The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.

20 In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months:

21 And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son.

22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

23 And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.

24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian:

25 For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.

26 And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?

27 But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?

28 Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?

29 Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.

30 And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush.

31 When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him,

32 Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold.

33 Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground.

34 I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.

35 This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.

36 He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

37 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.

38 This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:

39 To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,

40 Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

42 Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?

43 Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Molock, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.

44 Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen.

45 Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David;

46 Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.

47 But Solomon built him an house.

48 Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet,

49 Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool; what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?

50 Hath not my hand made all these things?

51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

53 Who received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

55 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,

56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Memory Verse: Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God who, also maketh intercession for us.

Rom. 8:34

Central Thought: Stephen's testimony showed clearly that Israel as a nation had departed from the true faith and spirit of Abraham and Moses and had lost sight of the Spirit of God. The leaders' reaction to Stephen's words was to condemn him to death.

Word Definitions: *Cut to the heart:* Pierced and deeply affected. *Brought in with Jesus:* This Jesus means Joshua. The words Joshua and Jesus come from the same Hebrew word "Jehoshua" which means "Jehovah saves." *Possession of the Gentiles:* This refers to the conquering of the land of Canaan. *By the disposition of angels:* The law was given, attended, and administered through the employment of angels.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Last Sunday's lesson ended with the face of Stephen before the council as the face of an angel. In answer to the high priest's question, "Are these things so?" Stephen launched into a summary of the history of the people of Israel beginning with Abraham's call of God. He rehearsed the course of Abraham and those who followed him, and how that Israel was taken down into Egypt in the time of Joseph. He brought in some details in his account of Moses that are not recorded in the Old Testament as we have it now in the King James version. He pointed out clearly how that Israel as a whole refused Moses at the start and in a much greater way later in the wilderness. Quoting from the prophet Amos in 5:25-27, Stephen showed that even during the time of Israel in the wilderness on their way to Canaan the people were idolatrous. Not only did they make the golden calf in defiance of the God of Moses, but they carried with them images that commanded their allegiance more than that of Jehovah. In our text we start with that part of Stephens' speech which mentions the

tabernacle of witness that God designed to Moses in the mount. This tabernacle and system of worship was brought in by Joshua in the possession of the promised Canaan land. One has only to read the account and see how abused and neglected the worship of God really was in the history of those times. Let us notice how Stephen connected this with David and his desire to build a house for God, which Solomon, his son, fulfilled. But let us look at Stephen's bold denunciation of these literal places of worship, quoting from Isa. 66:1, 2 which plainly declares that God cannot dwell in, or be worshipped with temples made with hands. In this Stephen is showing the vanity and emptiness of the then present Jewish worship. He declared that their blind and hardened hearts were resisting the Holy Spirit as Israel had done all along the way in the history he had just rehearsed. It was a scolding rebuke to the hypocrisy of these Jewish leaders and it infuriated them to condemn Stephen without a formal hearing and sentence. Thus, like his Lord, Stephen was condemned without a fair trial. But what a consolation this was for Stephen to look beyond their fury and to see Jesus standing, not just sitting, at the right hand of God. As our memory verse states: Who is he that condemneth us when we have Christ interceding for us at the right hand of God? —Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What did Stephen show to be God's true attitude toward temples made with hands?
2. What does this show that the tabernacle of Moses and the temple of Solomon were really meant for?
3. In what way were these statements offensive to Israel?
4. How did these Israelites and their fathers resist the Holy Ghost?
5. Is there any danger today of us resisting the Holy Spirit?
6. How can we safeguard our souls from doing this?
7. In what way did Stephen look into heaven?
8. What did he see in heaven?
9. What did the people do to Stephen?
10. What was the attitude and spirit with which he died?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

I think that the most outstanding part of our lesson is found in Stephen looking steadfastly into heaven and seeing the Lord Jesus standing on the right hand of God. It is a great

comfort and source of courage to the child of God to know assuredly that Jesus is at the right hand of God interceding for us in this troublesome world. Though we be defamed and persecuted in this time world, we are consoled to know that Jesus is appearing in the presence of God to plead our cause! When in the valley of affliction and suffering, we know that Jesus is drawing from the Father grace and help to send our way. When we are surrounded with confusion and dark discouragement, Jesus gets a word from the Father to send to us through the Holy Spirit. The unbelieving world around us is not aware that Jesus is at the right hand of God. Oh, they may believe that He went up to heaven according to the gospel, but do they know what He is doing up there? Thank God we know what Jesus is doing every day! He is blessing our souls and attending to our needs of life. He is ministering to the Church which is His body. He is saving all the unsaved who come unto God by Him, for He ever liveth to make intercession for them. He is commissioning His ministers in the service of His name to the saints and to precious souls. In short, He is directing His Father's kingdom and all of its activities. From the right hand of God He is doing a great work and service for us. How important it is to us that Christ is at the right hand of God! Let us not take this lightly. It was God's design to send Jesus into the world to accomplish His salvation for men, and then to receive Him up to His right hand as our great high priest. Let us look steadfastly into heaven and see Jesus at the right hand of God for us.

—Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The children of Israel, as is common to humanity, suffered from feelings of insecurity. When things became difficult and God was not the visible leader and deliverer they wished for, they turned to idol worship, which was common at that time.

History attributes much of the origin of idol worship to Nimrod. Nimrod was a great hunter (Gen. 10:8, 9) who became a famous leader of the Babylonian people. Nimrod means "he rebelled", and that is exactly what he did against God. He also turned the people away from God. The historian Josephus says, "Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God. . . . He also gradually changed the government into tyranny, seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God." When Nimrod died, Semiramis, his wife, proclaimed him as the sun-god. Later, when she gave

birth to a son, she claimed that her son, Tammuz, was Nimrod reborn. This developed into a religion of worship to Nimrod, the child, and his mother. When God confused the people because of the tower of Babel, this heathen religion was carried to the all the surrounding areas of Mesopotamia. It and its rites reappeared in many different civilizations down through history, most notably Papal Rome.

Israel was exposed to this influence while in Egypt. It was no happenstance that a golden calf was erected in the wilderness. Ralph Woodrow in the book "Babylon Mystery Religion" writes, "Much of the Babylonian worship was carried on through mysterious symbols — it was a 'mystery' religion. The golden calf, for example, was a symbol of Tammuz, son of the sun-god. Since Nimrod was believed to be the sun-god or Baal, fire was considered his earthly representation. Thus, we shall see, candles and ritual fires were lighted in his honor. In other forms, Nimrod was symbolized by sun images, fish, trees, pillars, and animals."

This was the established system that Stephen was opposing. He told them that they had made a place for their idols, but had not always provided room for God. The presentation of these facts stirred them to a murderous frenzy.

Perhaps we consider idol worship foolishness, but unless we provide a dwelling place for God in our hearts, we are no less guilty than the Israelites who failed to obtain favor of the One who wished to bless them. —Wayne Murphey

July 10, 1988

PHILIP PREACHES THE GOSPEL IN SAMARIA

Acts 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

8 And there was great joy in that city.

9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:

10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.

12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

Memory Verse: . . .How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! Romans 10:15.

Central Thought: The gospel of Jesus Christ brings salvation to the soul, healing to the body, and great joy to the hearts of all who believe and obey.

Word Definitions: *Saul made havoc of the Church:* To make havoc means to soil or insult or mistreat. *Sorcery:* Magic.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The trial and condemnation of Stephen seemed to bring about two things concerning the Church. First there arose a great storm of persecution against the Church at Jerusalem. Secondly, the disciples began to spread abroad the message of the gospel to other areas of Judea and Samaria. The twelve apostles remained in Jerusalem and kept their home base there for the time present. A young man by the name of Saul was making his first appearance on the scene. We see him showing his agreement and consent to the death of Stephen by keeping the garments of the murderers of Stephen,

doubtless taken off so as to be more violent in their stoning. We see this Saul turning into a zealous firebrand for the cause against the Church. Thank God, we shall see how that later he became a firebrand for the Church. Philip, like Stephen, was one of the seven previously appointed to oversee the work of caring for the widows. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, He began to preach the glad tidings of Christ. As the great host of the Christians began to scatter from the persecuting element in Jerusalem, Philip went to a city in Samaria. Adam Clarke is of the opinion that this city was the same city where Christ preached on the occasion of the conversion of the woman at the well, that is, Sychar, which probably is the same as Sychem or Shechem. The Samaritans are the first to hear the gospel outside of the Jews. How wonderful that they gave heed to the word, bringing great joy to their city! Even Simon, the magician, was so impressed that he believed and was baptized. We shall learn more about him in our next lesson.

—Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. How did Saul feel about the death of Stephen?
2. What happened to the Church when the persecution arose?
3. What did Saul begin to do to the Church?
4. What did the Church do when they were scattered abroad?
5. How did the people in Samaria respond to Philip?
6. What things accompanied Philip's preaching?
7. What had Simon done to the people of Samaria?
8. How did the people feel about Simon?
9. What did Simon do about the coming of the gospel?
10. How does the gospel bring great joy to people's lives?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is still the power of God unto salvation to every one who will respond to its message with faith and obedience. The message of salvation carries a great assurance with it. The heart is assured of its truth either by signs and wonders or by the comfort and persuasive influence of the Holy Spirit. The gospel shows the lies and vanity of Satan, thus enabling the person to escape the clutches of the devil and to dethrone him. Healing is given to the soul and body. Deliverance from evil habits and ways of life is given to those who will acknowledge and receive the truth. But Satan has his agents to counterfeit and misrepresent the power of God. This man named Simon was a

magician. Sorcery and witchery have been a snare of souls for a long time. Some tricks of magic are merely sleight of hand, that is, the hand can be quicker than the eye, but there are some magical works that are the works of Satan, and they are to be kept away from as far as participation is concerned. This Simon, had bewitched the people, getting them to think that he was the great power of God, but he was soon to be exposed. Satan can do a lot of things, but the real gospel will bring the truth to light. Many false prophets are gone out into the world. Let us not forget to beware of them.

—Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

It was persecution that caused the gospel to be scattered abroad. Although the early morning ministers were fleeing they were preaching the Word as they went. Their dedication and commitment to Christ and His gospel continued to burn within them. It has been true through the annals of time that the ministers who accomplished much for God were those who had a burden to do so.

The events surrounding George Whitfield's last day upon this earth reveals the motivation of a true servant of God. He brought a message in the morning with no other visible girding than his passion, for he was almost too weak to stand; and the crowd assembled that evening before the door of the house where he was staying and thronged the hallway, impatient to hear the man they loved. "I am tired," said Whitefield, "and must go to bed." He took a candle and was going to his bedroom when the sight of the people moved him. He paused on the staircase and began to preach. He preached until the candle went out in its socket. That night the candle of his life was also extinguished.

God has always been able to find someone willing to go forth with the gospel. Stephen with great fervor proclaimed it though it cost him his life. Philip took it to Samaria where it was gladly received by the hearers. Rejection and acceptance has continued to the story of the gospel, but through it all a faithful and dedicated ministry has continued to exist.

—Wayne Murphey

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July 17, 1988

PETER AND JOHN'S MISSION TO SAMARIA

Acts 8:14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,

19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

20 But Peter said unto him, thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

24 Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

25 And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

Memory Verse: For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. Romans 10:12.

Central Thought: The Holy Spirit is the gift of God freely given to all who believe in Christ and obey the gospel. To think that this blessing can be purchased with money is gross error in God's sight.

Word Definitions: *Holy Ghost:* The word "ghost" in our language is usually referring to a disembodied spirit, the spirit of a dead person said to haunt the living. For this cause I

believe that the term "Holy Spirit" is more appropriate to use. The Greek words that are translated "Holy Ghost" mean "Holy Spirit."

LESSON BACKGROUND

Philip had come, as we learned in our previous lesson, to Samaria with the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. By the help of the Lord, he had been very successful in his ministry there. Souls were saved and delivered from the power of Satan and sin. Jesus had left with the disciples the promise of the Holy Spirit to come from heaven and dwell within them. The Holy Spirit would be a personal experience and contact with the Father for each individual person. No longer would God deal in a collective manner only as from a distance. Christ had secured the infilling of the Holy Spirit for all who believe in Him. The Holy Spirit is not received at the time of one's conversion. He is received afterward at the proper time when each individual heart is prepared and ready to receive Him. When word reached the apostles who were at Jerusalem, that the people of Samaria had received Christ and had accepted the word of the gospel, they knew that these new converts to the Christian faith needed the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Peter and John were sent to minister to the disciples there concerning this need, and the hearts of these people were open and they were willing to receive all that God had for them. Simon, the one who had in previous times bewitched these people with sorceries, had also believed the gospel and had been baptized, but his heart was not right. A person can believe the gospel and be baptized and still not be right. The very suggestion of purchasing the power to impart the Holy Spirit with money was a very serious offense. It was an affront to the very nature and spirit of God. Simon did not seem to be desirous of the Holy Spirit as much as to possess the power to lay on hands and impart it to others. Simon was very worthy of the scolding rebuke that Peter gave him. We doubt if Simon got the message or was very repentant about the matter. He just asked for prayer that none of those things spoken by Peter would come upon Him. But they were already upon him. What he needed to do was to humble himself and repent of the vain thoughts of his heart.

—Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What was the reason that the apostles sent Peter and John to Samaria?

2. Is the Holy Spirit for every one who is really saved?
3. Does it come automatically at conversion?
4. How did these people in Samaria respond to the ministry of Peter and John?
5. What should Simon have been concerned about?
6. Why did he desire the power to lay on hands and impart the Holy Spirit?
7. What was the condition of his heart before God?
8. What did Peter tell Simon to do?
9. Do you think Simon was truly repentant?
10. Why did Peter and John not stay in Samaria to keep watch over the disciples there?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

The New Testament that God gave to us is administered by the Holy Spirit working and abiding in the inner man. The temple of God is man, not the works of man of stone and wood. The heart of man yielded, consecrated, and obedient in faith is the place where God seeks to dwell. Before Jesus came to atone for man and His sinful condition of heart, man was not fit to be a habitation for his Holy Maker, but now by the blood of Christ, our hearts can be made fit for the abiding Comforter, the Holy Spirit. Every person who experiences the forgiveness of sins and the new life of Christ making him a new creature should right away begin to seek to prepare his heart for this glorious Guest, the Holy Spirit. God has a way of dealing with each individual person to bring them to the place where they can receive this precious gift of God. God yearns to inhabit the soul of man. God earnestly desires to save that wicked sinner out there who is captivated by sin and Satan. He wants to purify and soften that heart that is so stained and wicked so that He can live within. The Holy Spirit within the heart of man can guide, preserve, inspire, strengthen, teach, and write within the very affections and mind the wondrous truths of His law. Oh, the unsaved soul cannot dream of the wonderful blessedness that can be his if he would only let God have his life! It is far beyond what words can describe! It is the free gift of God without money and without price. The only price for it has been paid by Christ on Calvary. Our part to attain to the Holy Spirit's presence is to be saved and made a new creature in Christ, and then make a complete consecration of heart and life to God and open our heart with a full assurance of faith, and receive the Holy Spirit.

—Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

One sharp winter's day, so goes the nursery tale, a poor woman stood at the window of a king's conservatory, looking at a cluster of grapes, which she longed to have for her sick child. She went home to her spinning wheel, earned half-a-crown, and offered it to the gardener for the grapes. He waved his hand and ordered her away. She returned to her cottage, snatched the blanket from her bed, pawned it, and once more asked the gardener to sell her the grapes, offering him five shillings. He spoke furiously to her and was turning her out, when the princess came in, heard the man's passion, saw the woman's tears, and inquired of the matter. When the story was told, the princess responded, "My dear woman, you have made a mistake. My father is not a merchant, but a king; his business is not to sell, but to give." So saying, she plucked the cluster from the vine and dropped it into the woman's apron.

We have a king in heaven who is more gracious than all earthly kings and He is the giver of all good gifts to those who ask of Him. His gifts are heavenly. If He were to place a price on the Holy Spirit, none could afford it.

From the reading of the Scriptures, it does not appear that Peter was even tempted to accept Simon's money, but how often do you see preachers from diversities of denominations making merchandise of the gospel? It pays to continually analyze the intent of our hearts, for the same judgment that was placed on Simon will be pronounced on everyone who pretends to follow Christ only to make a personal profit from the gospel.

—Wayne Murphey

July 24, 1988

PHILIP AND THE MAN FROM ETHIOPIA

Acts 8:26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,

28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.

29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:

33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.

34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

40 But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

Memory Verse: For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Romans 10:10.

Central Thought: A person who is hungry for righteousness and eager to know and follow the way of salvation will avail himself of the opportunity given him to receive grace of Christ.

Word Definitions: *Eunuch:* This is most evidently defined here as a chamberlain, which is an officer over the household affairs of a monarch; a treasurer, or state officer. *Caught away Philip:* The Greek word for caught away means "seized." This word is used only when it is referring to someone being

taken up by spiritual powers, such as Paul being caught up to paradise and the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2, 4) and the converts of the early morning Church pictured as caught up to God and His throne. (Rev. 12:5). Philip was literally taken by the Spirit of God, disappearing from the eunuch's sight.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Philip had been in the midst of a glorious work of the Lord in Samaria. Souls had been saved and delivered from the devil. There was great joy in that city. Peter and John had come from Jerusalem and had ministered the Holy Spirit to the believers, and a New Testament Church had been established in that place. But while all of this was going on there was a man who had come a long way to worship God at Jerusalem. Ethiopia was the country south of Egypt, a great distance from Jerusalem. This man was an important man who had a responsible place of authority under the Queen of the Ethiopians. He was her chief treasurer, no doubt a man of integrity and honor. Most important was that he was a worshipper of the true God. He had made that long journey to Jerusalem to worship. It was not just a formal obligation to him and although he was returning to his homeland in his chariot, he was still searching for truth and seeking the way of salvation. It was to this precious hungry soul that the Spirit of God directed Philip. The road lay in a southwestern course, and it may have taken Philip several days to arrive at the spot where he could intercept this seeker for truth. The timing was perfect and Philip was there when this man's chariot came rolling along. He had to run to catch him. The man was reading aloud to himself and Philip recognized the passage from Isaiah. Philip was invited to sit with the man in his chariot. The Scripture was from Isaiah 53. The quotation we have here was from the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament. Before the day was done a soul was saved and went on his way rejoicing, and Philip was found at Azotus, some miles to the north, where he preached, and continued his ministry northward until he came to Caesarea.

—Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did the Lord tell Philip to go south toward the desert?
2. What are the things we are told about this eunuch that makes us know that he was hungry for truth?
3. What was he doing as he rode along in his chariot?

4. What was this man's question concerning the Scripture in Isaiah?
5. What did Philip preach from this text?
6. What was Jesus likened unto in this Scripture?
7. Can you explain what the prophet meant by "in his humiliation his judgment was taken away"?
8. How did this eunuch show his faith and obedience?
9. What did the eunuch do after he was saved?
10. What happened to Philip?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

It is the hungry, thirsty soul who is attended upon by God in His great mercy. People who are satisfied with themselves and not eager to learn the way of the Lord remain in their desert. They pass their lives, uninterested, uninformed, and unblessed. But to that soul who listens to that inner craving for fellowship with God, there will be a desire to seek that blessed fulfillment. Life's golden quest is to find God and be at peace with Him. It is good and vital in one's quest for the Lord to study and search the Scriptures. One who omits the Scriptures in His effort to find the way of truth opens his heart to many a deception of Satan. The Holy Bible reveals the way to salvation. We may not understand the sacred writings at first, but if we keep hungry and inquisitive for the real truth, God will see to it that we see the light. How sweet it is when a person who is seeking for life is given the chance to hear the real gospel! The gospel has its own witness, its own built-in assurance that comforts the hearer to know that this is the right way. And then when that eager heart finds the way, he is quick to walk therein. Regardless of what the Lord commands or prescribes, it is a pleasure to obey. And how sweet it is to the vessel that the Lord uses to bring the message of salvation! It is the greatest joy to see souls respond to the gospel and find that wonderful pearl of great price. Both the preacher and the convert go on their way rejoicing. A new life to live, a great vocation to follow and fulfill, and a great hope to press toward, is the treasure of the soul who has hungered for and sought salvation and believed the truth.

—Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

In our lesson today we find that Philip had just as much of a burden and was just as willing to instruct one Ethiopian as he had been to teach the whole town of Samaria. Sometimes it

is rather discouraging because there are so few who are interested in the gospel, but if we are instrumental in enlightening just one soul, it is worth all our effort.

One university professor wrote, "Harvard University pays me for doing what I would gladly pay for the privilege of doing if I could only afford it." Our attitude toward the gospel should be one of counting it a privilege to be able to share it. The blessings received cannot be equaled by monetary value.

Another lesson that can be learned by the Ethiopian story is the blessedness of learning. God always has something to teach us. His ways are deep and wonderful and in this life we will not come to a full understanding of them. However, God will teach us as much as we are able to comprehend and as much as we are willing to learn.

"Give me thy voice to speak, thine ear to listen.

Give me thy mind to grasp thy mystery;

So shall my heart throb and my glad eyes glisten,

Rapt with the wonders thou dost show to me."

—James H. Moulten

We may not be physically caught up as was Philip, but our spirits can be caught up by the inspiration of God as we follow and labor for Him.

—Wayne Murphey

Take My Mother In

This is an incident in the life of a celebrated London pastor.

Dr. B— was the clergyman in charge of a very fashionable and rich congregation. One night, about half-past eleven, the doorbell rang, and he was asked for by a young Highland woman; nor could the housekeeper persuade her to go away until she saw the pastor.

"What is it, Miss?" Dr. B— asked, as he came to the door.

"Why, sir, I want you to come with me at once, and take my mother in."

"Take your mother in?" he answered. "That is not in my line. Why don't you get a policeman?"

"Ain't you a preacher-man?"

"Yes, I'm a preacher, but I don't take people in."

"You must come with me. My mother is dying, and I said I must get the preacher-man. Now come and take her in."

At last Dr. B— understood that the girl's mother needed someone to speak to her about salvation, and urged the girl to get an evangelist living nearer to her home than he. But she

would not go, and at last Dr. B— had to accompany her to a distant part of London. What would his congregation think, he thought, if they should see him at that hour in such company?

The house proved to be in a miserable neighborhood. Downstairs men and women were drinking and carousing. Upstairs Dr. B— found the woman lying on a miserable bed, evidently near death.

"Are you the preacher-man?" she asked as he came in.

"Yes, what can I do for you?" he answered.

"Why, sir, I'm dying, and I want you to take me in to heaven!"

Dr. B— did not know what to say. So he spoke of a beautiful life, and its results, and its rewards at the end.

"No! no!" the woman cried; "That won't do! I'm dying, and I want you to take me in!"

He tried again, and told of the benefits of living as a Christian; but that could not help the dying woman.

"That won't do! That won't do!" she exclaimed. "I'm a poor sinner; I've no time to lead a Christian life. I'm dying—and I want to go in!"

Dr. B— did not know what to do or say. He had never had anything like this before; but at last he thought of the simple gospel stories his mother had taught him when a child. So he began to tell the woman the incidents and parables from the Gospel which he remembered, for he had a good memory.

"That's it! That's it!" the woman cried. "Tell me again—some more!" And he did so; at last making the gospel so plain and simple that the woman grasped it, and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as her Saviour; and that night, as Dr. B— expressed it, she "got in."

Telling all this to a friend afterward, Dr. B— said, "The poor woman got into heaven that night; and, do you know, I got in myself also!"

He had been a preacher for years, but had not known the gospel. After that, you can be sure, he was as plain and simple as he could be in his preaching.

"The blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John 1:7).

—Selected

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July 31, 1988

CHRIST APPREHENDS SAUL

Acts 9:1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

5 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.

6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.

9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth.

12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Memory Verse: Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:12.

Central Thought: Although Saul was persecuting Him, Jesus chose to arrest Saul and make him aware of His power, so as to win Saul's love and allegiance for the service of His name.

Word Definitions: *Pricks:* Sharp points, stings, or goads. *Saul:* The Hebrew name which is translated in the Greek as Paul.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The young man who had kept the clothes of those who had killed Stephen had become a terrible oppressor of the saints. He later referred to himself as being at that time a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious. (1 Tim. 1:13). He added that he obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly in unbelief. This young man named Saul later became known as Paul. For some reason his zeal for the old Jewish law system mushroomed into a vehement hatred for the followers of Jesus Christ. We see him persecuting them even to strange and far-off cities, haling men and women to prison. He gave his voice against some who were put to death. (Acts 26:10, 11). There was something in his heart and mind that Christ recognized as conscientious and sincere zeal for what he believed was right. He was ignorant, though, and completely deluded by the darkness of Satan. Jesus Christ, from His place in glory, made a special move to awaken this young man to the truth. There were others who were with Saul as he journeyed that day, nearing Damascus. He testified later that it was midday and that the light which shone about him was above the brightness of the sun. It was a changed man who was (being blinded by the light) led to Damascus where he spent three days without food or water, praying and calling on the name of the Lord. Jesus had someone in Damascus who was in contact with Him. He needed someone to visit Saul, and Ananias was the man he used for that mission. Ananias' hesitation at going was understandable. But, as we shall later see, he was willing to go, for Christ was making choice of this man, Saul, to be a chosen vessel in the work of the gospel.

—Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What were Saul's complaints and charges against the disciples of the Lord?
2. What happened to Saul as he neared Damascus?
3. What was his mission to Damascus?
4. Who spoke to Saul as he lay stricken on the earth?
5. In what way was Saul kicking against the pricks?
6. What caused Saul to change his attitude so suddenly toward Jesus?
7. What was Saul mostly doing those three days in Damascus?
8. What vision did Saul see while waiting in Damascus?
9. Why was Ananias hesitant about going to Saul?
10. How did the Lord reassure Ananias about Saul?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

God doesn't have much desire and zeal toward a complacent, lukewarm, disinterested, and indifferent soul. A person who despises and lightly esteems the gospel message is not likely to feel much conviction thereby. A person who strongly disbelieves the Bible and conscientiously seeks to refute its message, stands a greater chance of becoming convinced of the truth than the shallow-minded, indifferent man. There is the story of a man who felt sorry for Christians and the myth that he thought they were believing and being deluded with. With a concern to expose the lie that he believed Christianity to be, he decided to write a book against Christ. He felt that he needed much information and format to back his writing on the subject and therefore went to many places to gather material to use as his basis in seeking to refute the Christian faith. But as he searched and studied, he was greatly overwhelmed by the historical and testimonial evidence weighing heavily in favor of the truth of Christ Jesus. This, along with the conviction that heavily seized upon his own soul, caused him to become persuaded that Christ was what He was given out to be, and ultimately led to his own conversion. Many times people reject Christ in their dull, disinterested minds that are degraded by the vanities of their own fleshly lusts. It soothes their conscience to just discredit the idea of life hereafter and final judgment. But they make no effort to substantiate their claims and go on in their shame. Such is the majority of humanity. Satan snatches the Word out of their hearts before they have any space to get serious about it. Instead of being open-minded and honest about it, they cast it

aside and pursue headlong the allurements of sin and the flesh that hasten them on their journey to perdition.

—Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

A great many forces go into action to bring a soul to a saving state of conviction. God's love is brought to bear upon the subject. God's power is on hand to rebuke the power of the enemy and loosen whatever hold he may have upon an individual and make the enemy stand back and give the subject an opportunity to make up his mind to serve the Lord if he so chooses. God's Holy Spirit is pleading, the angels are anxiously watching, all heaven is at attention, for an eternal soul is hanging in the balance. But the factor that is of special interest in this case is the saints, the Church, the body of believers. When Zion travails or is burdened and is laboring, she brings forth! Let us not overlook this factor. If word were to reach your ears that one engaged in the business of overthrowing Christians was on his way to our town to seek out those who served Christ, what would be the reaction? You would go in unison down before God in prayer and fasting and labor before Him with travail of soul for God to interfere and deliver His people. God heard the cry of His saints and because Paul had an honest heart, was able to save him, which, of course, delivered the saints. Let us not fail to recognize and exercise the influence we, the church, have in salvation work.

—C. W. Wilson

(Written in 1970)



August 7, 1988

SAUL PREACHING THE FAITH

HE ONCE DESTROYED

Acts 9:17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, 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.

18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

21 But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:

24 But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.

29 And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.

30 Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

Memory Verse: Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. Ephesians 3:8.

Central Thought: The conversion to Christ of one of His worst enemies was a great blessing and edification to the Church as well as a surprise and a cause of dismay to the unbelievers.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Our lesson last Sunday brought us up to where the Lord called on Ananias, a disciple at Damascus, to go and minister to Saul who was praying and had seen a vision of him coming to pray for him. He assured Ananias that Saul was a chosen vessel to preach His name, and that he was to suffer great things for His name's sake. In rehearsing this to the angry mob at Jerusalem in Acts 22:12, Paul said that Ananias was a devout (reverent, pious, godly) man according to the law, and had a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there. Ananias obeyed the Lord and went to Saul. We notice that he called him "Brother Saul." He recognized Saul as a new convert to Christ, one who had repented of his sins and had truly believed on the Lord Jesus. The exact moment of Saul's conversion we do not know, but we are sure that sometime between Christ's appearing to him on the Damascus road and the coming to him of Ananias, Saul made a complete turn around. He had washed his sins away in the blood of the Lamb and was ready to be baptized and to be filled with the Holy Spirit. His eyes were opened both spiritually and physically. He companied for several days with the Church in Damascus, and right away began to go into the places of worship of the Jews, proclaiming that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. This enraged the Jews and after many days they were out to get him. After escaping from Damascus he went to Jerusalem and tried to get in with the disciples, but was not accepted because everyone was afraid of him. But Barnabas, whose name meant "son of consolation," (Acts 4:36), came to Saul's rescue and declared his genuine conversion, reassuring the disciples. What a blessing and a victory this was to the Church! As Paul said later in Galatians 1:24, "And they glorified God in me."

—Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What did it indicate for Ananias to say, "Brother Saul"?
2. Why was it needful and beneficial for Saul to be with the Damascus Church for awhile?
3. What was the people's reaction in hearing Saul preach for Jesus?
4. How did Saul get along with the Jews in Damascus?
5. Why did the Jews want to kill him?
6. How did Saul escape?
7. Why did Saul have trouble joining himself to the disciples at Jerusalem?
8. Who helped him in this matter?
9. How did Saul do in his preaching at Jerusalem?
10. What effect did Saul's conversion have on the Church and the work of the Lord?

ADULTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus to Jesus Christ and His faith is one of the greatest testimonies of history as to the truth of Christ. No one seemed to work any harder against Jesus before, and no one worked any harder for Him after becoming a believer. To see that terrible persecutor falling at the cross of the Lord Jesus was a triumph for the Church indeed. No doubt it was a dark time for the Church when Saul was breathing out his threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. One professed the name of Christ at the peril of his life. Perhaps it never occurred to any of them that this raging persecutor was doing what he felt was God's will. Outwardly Saul was a terror, but inwardly he was a miserable and defeated man. In the 7th chapter of Romans we get a little glimpse of his true self while under the law. He testified that sin had him in wretched bondage. And while in this condition he was taking vengeance against Christ, the only one who could set him free. God has wonderful ways in dealing with souls. We should never give up on anyone. No doubt the Christians were praying for Saul. And God was working on him all the time. God is still on the throne of power and the hearts of men are in His hand. Those who resist His ordinance do but confound their own selves. The Lord will stretch out His hand for the welfare of His cause. We are to never be terrified at the adversaries of the truth. The Lord spoke in Isaiah 54:17, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith

the Lord." As Paul later said, "If God be for us, who can be against us"? (Romans 8:31).

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Let us notice that Paul made public confession of his conversion right away. He had a great love for God and a desire to retrieve the wrongs of the past, a yearning to bring others to the great fountain of the blood of Jesus where he himself had been washed clean from his sins and his soul fully satisfied. He made no secret of his change. He "proclaimed Jesus, that he is the Son of God." We must take bold and brave stands for God to be an overcomer.

Saul left almost immediately for Arabia where he stayed for three years before he went up to Jerusalem and then out to preach for the Lord. He saw the need of waiting before the Lord. Later we find that he instructed the young minister, Timothy, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2:15) He also told him to "strive not about words to no profit." Those who are called of God to teach should study, ever seeking for the Holy Spirit to interpret the Word of God to them. The Holy Spirit is our teacher. We also note that Saul talked to those in Jerusalem who were "apostles before me." We should be willing to take instructions from those who have been along the way. Those who disassociate themselves from other believers are not being led of Christ. Jesus instructed Peter to "strengthen the brethren" (Luke 22:32). We do need each other.

—Marie Miles

(Written in 1970)

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August 14, 1988

PETER MINISTERS AT LYDDA AND JOPPA

Acts 9:32 And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.

33 And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy.

34 And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.

35 And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.

36 Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.

37 And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.

38 And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.

39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.

40 But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

41 And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.

42 And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.

43 And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

Memory Verse: As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 1 Peter 4:10.

Central Thought: Simon Peter exercised the power and authority given to him as an apostle of Jesus Christ by visiting those in need, bringing healing to the sick, and even raising back to life one who had died.

Word Definitions: *Peter passed throughout all quarters:* He visited the saints in the various places now that Saul was a

Christian and the persecution had eased up. *Saron*: The place of Sharon where the noted rose of Sharon bloomed, was the region along the Mediterranean sea coast from Joppa extending up north of Caesarea. *Tabitha*: Clarke explains that Tabitha was a Syriac name meaning the same as the Greek name Dorcas.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Our study continues concerning the progress of the functions of the early morning Church. Our last Sunday's lesson ended with the new brother Saul being sent to his home city of Tarsus by the brethren to get away from those who were seeking his life. Because of Saul's conversion, the congregations had rest throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and were greatly comforted in the faith. Peter had been remaining with the other apostles at Jerusalem, and our lesson begins with him taking a trip among the various congregations, probably with a desire to be a blessing and an encouragement, while he was at Lydda he encountered one of the brethren who had been sick of the palsy for eight years. Through faith in Jesus, this man, Aeneas by name, was marvellously healed. Doubtless this man's condition was well-known in that area and the news of his recovery was a great testimony for Christ, causing many to turn to the Lord. Lydda was probably about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem. About 10 miles on farther northwest over on the seacoast, lay the town of Joppa. Peter was called to Joppa on the occasion of the sad loss of one of the most loved Christian sisters in that congregation. What a blessing this woman had been to all the poor and the widows in that area! They were all there weeping and showing Peter the coats and garments which Dorcas had made for them while she was yet with them. Peter had to get alone with God. On his knees alone in the room where Dorcas lay, he invoked the mercies and goodness of God. Through the Holy Spirit directing and inspiring his faith he was able to command Dorcas to rise again. The effect of these two marvellous miracles proved to further the gospel in the hearts of the people.

—Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. How did Peter succeed in inspiring the faith of Aeneas?
2. What effect did this man's healing have on those who heard about it?
3. What kind of Christian was this woman Dorcas?

4. What did they do with her body when she died?
5. Why did they not proceed at once with plans for burial?
6. Why did they send for Peter?
7. Did the widows' tears and the garments Dorcas had made have any bearing on this case?
8. Why is a life full of good works and almsdeeds so precious in God's sight?
9. Why did Peter ask them to leave the room?
10. What effect did this miracle have in that community?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

We must always bear in mind that this mortal life is constantly subject to acquiring sickness, affliction, injury, and even death. The most saintly person can be touched by these things. Thank the Lord for His goodness in visiting and offering help and deliverance in those kinds of times! To be healed of the Lord through prayer and faith is a blessed experience indeed. When the affliction is severe and of long standing, the deliverance is that much more precious and wonderful. We must never lose faith and courage in the time of affliction. The Lord has His eye on every one of us. He sees the faith and steadfastness that His child maintains in the battles of life. God is going to reward the faith of His saints. They are precious in His sight. Along with faith and trust in God, it is glorifying to Him for us to cultivate love and care for our fellow man. Wisely did Paul instruct us in Galatians 6:10, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Again we are told in Hebrews 13:16, "But to do good and to communicate [share or give] forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." One who diligently seeks the good and welfare of others from the spirit of the love of God in their hearts not only is happy and blessed, but he or she is sowing seed that is sure to be a rich harvest. May we be able to see the value of a life of faith in God and caring for others, and apply ourselves to that endeavor.

—Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Peter had received much mercy and many blessings at the hand of God. Before the day of Pentecost he seemed to be more of a liability than a help to Christ, but Jesus was patient, longsuffering, and forgiving and now in our lesson we find Peter giving to others.

"... freely ye have received, freely give." Matt. 10:8. This is a missionary spirit. The Church today needs more of a missionary spirit. A Church without it will eventually cease to be. A missionary spirit includes, but does not necessitate, preaching, healing the sick, or going across the sea. It is an attitude of the mind and spirit. It is constantly being open to putting your abilities and opportunities to the best use for the good of mankind and the glory of God. It is motivated by a desire and not a feeling of obligation. It is a God-given burden and not a man-imposed requirement.

David Livingston had the proper perspective on this subject. Here is what he said about it: "People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply paid back as a small part of a great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay? Is that a sacrifice which brings its own best reward in healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter? Away with the word in such a view, and with such a thought! It was emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering or danger, now and then, with a foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life, may make us pause, and cause the spirit to waver and the soul to sink, but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall hereafter be revealed in and for us. I never made a sacrifice. Of this we ought not to talk when we remember the great sacrifice which He made who left His Father's throne on high to give Himself for us." —Wayne Murphey

The Cleansing Power Of The Blood of Christ

By Charles G. Finney

I was holding a revival in Detroit. One night as I started to walk into the church building, a man came up to me and said, "Are you Mr. Finney?"

"Yes."

"I wonder if you will do me a favor. When you get through tonight, will you come home with me and talk to me about my soul?"

"Gladly. You wait for me." I walked inside and some of the men stopped me.

"What did the man want, Brother Finney?"

"He wanted me to go home with him."

"Don't do it."

"I am sorry, but I promised and I shall go with him."

When the service was over the man and I walked three blocks, into a side street, down an alley, and stopped, unlocked the door and he said to me, "Come in." I walked into the room. The man locked the door, reached into his pocket, pulled out a revolver and held it in his hand. "I don't intend to do you any harm," he said. "I just want to ask you a few questions. Did you mean what you said in your sermon last night?"

"What did I say? I have forgotten."

"You said, 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.' "

"Yes, God says so."

The man said, "Brother Finney, you see this revolver? It has killed four people. It is mine. Two of them were killed by me, two of them by my bartender in a brawl in my saloon. Is there hope for a man like me?"

I said, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."

The man said, "Brother Finney, another question. In the back of this partition is a saloon. I own it, everything in it. We sell every kind of liquor to anybody who comes along. Many times I have taken the last penny out of a man's pocket, letting his wife and children go hungry. Many times women have brought their babies here and pled with me not to sell any more booze to their husbands, but I have driven them out and kept right on with the whiskey selling. Is there any hope for a man like me?"

I said, "God says, 'The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.' "

"Another question, Brother Finney. In back of this other partition is a gambling joint and it is as crooked as sin and Satan. There isn't a decent wheel in the whole place. It is all loaded and crooked. A man leaves the saloon with money left in his pocket, and we take his money away from him in there. Men have gone out of that gambling place to commit suicide when their money and perhaps trusted funds were all gone. Is there any hope for a man like me?"

I said, "God says, 'The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.' "

"One more question, and I will let you go. When you walk out of this alley, you turn to the right and you'll see a brown stone house. It is my home. I own it. My wife is there, and my eleven-year-old child, Margaret. Thirteen years ago I went to New York on business. I met a beautiful girl. I lied to her. I told her I was a stock broker, and she married me. I brought her here, and when she found out my business, it broke her heart. I have made life a hell on earth for her. I have come home drunk, beaten her, abused her, locked her out, made her life more miserable than that of any brute beast. About a month ago I went home drunk, mean, miserable. My wife got in the way somehow, and I started beating her. My daughter threw herself between us. I slapped the girl across the face and knocked her against a red-hot stove. Her arm is burned from the shoulder to the wrist. It will never look like anything decent. Brother Finney, is there hope for a man like me?"

I took hold of that man's shoulder, shook him, and said, "Oh, son, what a black story you have to tell! But God says, 'The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son cleanseth us from all sin.' "

The man said, "Thank you; thank you very much. Pray for me. I am coming to church tomorrow night."

I went about my business. The next morning, about seven o'clock, the saloon man started across the street out of his office. His face was dusty and sweaty and tearstained. He was shaking and rocking as though he were drunk. But let us go back to that room. He had taken a swivel chair and smashed the mirror, the fireplace, the desk and the other chairs. He had smashed the partition on each side. Every bottle and bar mirror in that saloon was shattered and broken up. The sawdust was swimming ankle-deep in a terrible mixture of beer, gin, whiskey, and wine. In the gambling establishment, the tables were smashed, the dice and cards were in the fireplace smouldering. He staggered across the street, walked up the stairs of his home, and sat down heavily in the chair in his room. His wife called the little girl. "Maggie, run upstairs and tell Daddy breakfast is ready." The girl walked slowly up the stairs. Half-afraid, she stood in the door and said, "Daddy, Mamma said breakfast was ready; to come down."

"Maggie, darling, Daddy doesn't want any breakfast."

That little girl didn't walk; she just flew down the stairs. "Mamma, Daddy said, 'Maggie, darlin', and he didn't—"

"Maggie, you didn't understand. You go back upstairs and tell Daddy to come down." Maggie went back upstairs with

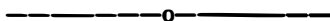
the mother following her. The man looked up as he heard the child's step, spread his knee out, and said, "Maggie, come here."

Shyly, frightened, in a tremble, the little girl walked up to him. He lifted her, put her on his knee, pressed his face against her breast and wept. The wife, standing in the door, didn't know what had happened. After awhile he noticed her and said, "Wife, come here."

He sat her on his other knee, threw his big arms around those whom he loved, whom he had so fearfully abused, lowered his face between them, and sobbed.

After some minutes he controlled himself, looked up into the faces of his wife and girl and said, "Wife, daughter, you needn't be afraid of me anymore. God has brought you a new man, a new daddy home today."

That same night that man, his wife, and their child, walked down the aisle of the church and gave their hearts to Christ. After that it was always such a privilege to go into that home where Christ held such an honored place in each heart. "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37)



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August 21, 1988

TAKING HEED TO OUR SPIRIT

Romans 8:9 . . . Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

Galatians 4:6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

1 Corinthians 6:17 . . . He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.

19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

1 Peter 3:3 Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel;

4 But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

1 Timothy 4:12 Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

2 Timothy 1:7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

2 Corinthians 4:13 We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak.

Psalms 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

Proverbs 11:13 A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.

Proverbs 16:19 Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.

32 He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

Proverbs 25:28 He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.

Memory Verse: It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. **John 6:63.**

Central Thought: God cannot and will not be in fellowship with a man whose spirit and life are contrary to His Spirit. To be joined to the Lord we must be made through grace, to be humble, pure, faithful, and righteous as He is.

Word Definitions: *Abba:* Greek word for father. *Plaiting:* Elaborate braiding and entwining ornamental material in the hair. *Spirit:* We want to define the spirit as the central part of a man, the out-breathing of his life toward God and his fellow man; this involves his attitudes, feelings, thoughts, and manners of life. *Contrite:* Collapsed, crumbled, crushed.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In the Scriptures, the spirit of man is referred to many times. We cannot include every Scripture on this subject, but we have selected several that bear out the truth that we are concerned with in this lesson. When Jesus set His face to go up to Jerusalem, He sent messengers before Him who entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for Him. When word came back that He was not welcome there, two of His disciples asked if He wanted them to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elias did. Christ's answer was a rebuke: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." (Luke 9:51-56). It is very easy for a man to take the wrong attitude toward something or someone and to have a wrong spirit about it. The prophet Malachi in 2:11-15, spoke of men who had profaned the holiness of the Lord and had married the daughter of a strange god. He later called the holiness of the Lord the wife of their youth against whom they had dealt treacherously. In dealing with this sad condition the prophet said, "Take heed to your spirit." It is the kind of spirit that we maintain that decides our eternal destiny. Look at all the various illustrations in our lessons of the kind of spirit God wants us to have. Let us take heed that we have the kind of spirit that the holy and gracious God can blend with. Let us pray that we properly understand what kind of spirit was in our blessed Lord Jesus. And may we drink into that Spirit and may our spirit be able to be joined unto the Lord.

—Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of spirit did our blessed Saviour have?
2. When we have the spirit of sonship with God, what will be our attitude toward Him?

3. From our Scriptures here, what kind of spirit must a man have to be united with the Lord?
4. How can adorning the outer man and the wearing of gold be contrary to the principles of meekness and quietness of spirit?
5. Why is a spirit of fear a hindrance to the soul?
6. How does a spirit of love and power enable one to have the spirit of faith?
7. Why is a proud spirit offensive to God?
8. What are some of the times in a person's life when they have to really rule their spirit diligently?
9. What kind of benefit and profit are there in the words of Christ?
10. Whose responsibility is it to keep one's spirit right?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

The spirit is the most important part of a person. Let the spirit be wrong, and the whole man will be affected. Satan is always on hand to seek to infuse into us a wrong reaction or attitude that will cause our spirit to be defiled. It is a daily watch and responsibility for every one of us to take heed to and keep a close rule over our spirit. Instead of the spirit of Christ we can manifest an ugly spirit. A spirit of pride, of unbelief, of fear, or of selfishness, cannot blend with the meek and lowly Lamb of God. How many lives have been wrecked, homes divided and destroyed, souls lost, and hearts broken down through the ages of time all because someone did not keep the right spirit! Instead of being kind and forgiving, many have become hard, cold, and bitter. Jesus came into the world to show us what kind of spirit that God wants us to have. When He faced the death of the cross He showed us what kind of spirit to have. His spirit was pure, sweet, gentle, firm and steadfast, obedient to God, humble, meek, lowly, wise, faithful, holy, prayerful, watchful, diligent, gracious, loving, true, patient, and in every way a perfect example for all of us to follow. We are going to be held accountable for the spirit that we have before God and our fellow man. Let us take heed in our everyday life to what kind of spirit rules us. Oh, how we want to be one spirit with the Lord Jesus! But we cannot be united with Him if we allow a wrong spirit to dominate us. It is our responsibility to have and maintain the kind of spirit that God is pleased with, and that will blend into holy union with His Son.

—Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Having a spirit that is conformed to that of Christ is something that causes a carefulness in our lives. The meaning of the word spirit is closely associated with wind and breath. This would indicate that our very existence should be pure and Christlike. If one could subtract all the good thoughts and actions from a Christian's life there should be nothing left of them. The vast majority of the people in the world could give up all their goodness and still have much of a day's actions remaining. There would still be pride, vulgarity, bitterness, envy, backbiting, lust, and a variety of other evils. Christ's spirit gives us power over these things and we do not have to be tainted by them.

One of the most intriguing and endearing qualities of a saint is humility. One Aesop fable tells of a young man who had been traveling in foreign parts. He returned to his home city where he bragged and boasted to all who would listen of the great feats he had accomplished in the places he had visited. "Why, when I was in Rhodes," he shouted, thumping his chest, "I made the most extraordinary leap the people of that place had ever seen. I have witnesses to prove it, too." In time his hearers became weary of the traveler's boasts, and one of them said, "These exploits of yours in Rhodes may all be true, but you can save yourself much breath by doing one of those marvelous leaps right now instead of merely talking about it." Pride is usually more subtle than this man's, but no matter at what degree it manifests itself, it is contemptible to behold. In contrast, humility is so attractive that one verse says that God "... resisteth the proud, but giveth grace [favor] unto the humble." James 4:6. —Wayne Murphey

August 28, 1988

THE CALL OF CORNELIUS — Part 1

Acts 10:1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,

2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.

3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.

4 And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said,

What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

5 And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter:

6 He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

7 And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually;

8 And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the house top to pray about the sixth hour:

10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,

11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:

12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

16 This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.

Memory Verse: For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. 1 Peter 3:12.

Central Thought: In answer to the prayers of Cornelius, a Gentile, who was seeking to know God's will, the Spirit of God moved to bring him in contact with one of the Lord's servants whom God was also preparing to minister the gospel to him.

Word Definitions: *Centurion:* A captain over a band of soldiers, usually about 100 in number. *Devout:* Godly. *Evidently about the ninth hour:* Apparently, clearly, plainly about 3:00 p.m. *Alms:* Giving to the poor. *Tanner:* A leather-worker. *Sixth hour:* 12:00 noon. *Trance:* A vision. *Common:* Profane or defiled. *Thrice:* Three times.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The Jews from olden times had considered themselves as a special people set apart from all other peoples on earth, and they were. As a nation they were to be separate unto God, not reckoned among the nations, but alone and distinct as a peculiar treasure unto the Almighty God. But this separation was really only symbolical of the separation that was to be true in the holy Church of God as separate from the spirit and ways of sin and this present evil world. As a Jew, Simon Peter had been programmed in his mind that he was not to company or consort with non-Jews just as he had been taught to not eat certain animals who were counted by the law as unclean. But God was about to break down the middle wall of partition between the Gentile and the Jew. It was time for the gospel to be opened to all men for whom the Lord Jesus had freely spilled His precious blood. There were people all over the world who were seeking to know the true God. They were in ignorance, groping for the light. Here was Cornelius, a Roman army officer. He and his band were members of the Roman occupational forces who were stationed all over the empire. How much this man knew about Jesus is doubtful, but he surely believed in God, fearing and reverencing Him, and praying continually to Him. He stated later that he was fasting at the time of his vision of the angel and was in prayer. This man was seeking God with all of his heart. His alms and his prayers were precious in God's sight. At three o'clock in the afternoon this man was in prayer. He obeyed the angel and sent two of his household servants and a godly soldier to Joppa to contact Peter. About noon Peter was going up on the housetop to pray. There he had a vision that bore a message to his heart. At that time he did not understand its true meaning. But, as we shall see, it became very clear to him later. The "all manner of wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air" that he saw in the vision represented the various nationalities of men, from whom at that very moment an embassy was approaching the very house where he lodged, seeking him for knowledge of the heavenly way.

—Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of a man was Cornelius?
2. What nationality was Cornelius?
3. How did God look upon Cornelius?
4. What do you think Cornelius was mainly praying about?

5. What did he do in response to the angel's message?
6. What did Peter go upon the housetop at noon for?
7. What did Peter see in his vision?
8. What had God cleansed that He did not want called common?
9. What was the message that was in this vision for Peter?
10. How many times was this scene shown to Peter?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

God is a rewarder of them who diligently seek Him. The disinterested and unconcerned are left out in the cold. Cornelius, like the Ethiopian eunuch, was seeking earnestly for the knowledge of God. Not only was he seeking to know more of God's will, he was already diligent to put into practice all that he knew that would please God. God is pleased with a benevolent spirit and attitude, wherever it is found. It is good for a person to set themselves in humble prayer and even in denial of food, to seek the blessings of the Lord and His wonderful help. God has promised to be found of us when we seek Him with our whole heart. An earnest outreach of the desires and affections for God is a very important and vital exercise for a human being. God loves to be sought for by His created beings. He desires to be wanted. He hides Himself sometimes so as to increase and enhance the longing and thirsting that we feel for Him. Anyone who has an open and willing heart can perceive that there is a real living God. And that awareness can cause the heart to begin to seek Him. God has wonderful ways to open up doors for the seeking soul. I read of a man who was giving out gospel tracts on a train. He handed a tract to a proud young woman who in turn released it from her dainty fingers out the window. The tract fell at the feet of a farmer who was mending a fence. This farmer was needing help and seeking God. The tract was the means of him getting the help to his soul that he needed. God will see to it that the earnestly seeking soul will find Him. —Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

It is possible for the Church today to be as Peter and have ideas that will confine the Word of the Lord. We need a clear vision of God's love for people in all walks of life. We should never allow beliefs to develop that would prevent us from sharing God's Word with those who may not see eye to eye with us. I realize that there are those who gender strife and arguments, but I also believe that God is able to lead us to

those who are honest hearted, just as God led Peter to Cornelius. We should never allow a "Christian pride" in our hearts that would distance us from others who are serving God. We should never imbibe a "worldly pride" that would cause us to look down on any of God's creation and find us negligent in having a burden for all souls. Let us search our hearts by God's Word and make sure that there are no barriers that would prevent the onward movement of God's Church.

It is possible for customs to become of more importance to us than the salvation of souls. The allegorical story is told about a groom who used to steal the grain intended for the horse and, without his master's knowledge, sell it in the village. But all day long he kept very busy grooming and currying the horse within an inch of its life. "If you are really so anxious that I look well," said the horse one day to his groom, "then give me less of your brushing and more of your corn." The world is in need of something substantial to feed their souls. To "westernize" or program them to a certain lifestyle will fall short of bringing peace and satisfaction in Christ.

—Wayne Murphey

September 4, 1988

THE CALL OF CORNELIUS — Part 2

Acts 10:17 Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,

18 And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.

19 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.

20 Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.

21 Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?

22 And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.

23 Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

24 And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.

26 But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.

27 And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.

28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

29 Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?

Memory Verse: Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Matthew 5:6.

Central Thought: Peter, perceiving the message of God revealed in the vision on the housetop, accompanied the messengers from Cornelius to Caesarea where he found Cornelius and many others gathered together, waiting to hear the gospel.

LESSON BACKGROUND

God visited Simon Peter while he was on the housetop with a vision in which was given a message of dire importance at that time. While he was having this vision there were three men approaching the house where he was lodging. These three men were sent from Caesarea, commissioned by the centurion Cornelius to seek out Peter and bring him back with them. As we learned in our last Sunday's lesson, God had commanded by an angel for Cornelius to do this. The wall between the Jew and the Gentile was a wall in the minds of the Jews, and it was time, as far as the gospel of Christ was concerned, for that wall to come down. In the vision Peter had seen all manner of beasts, creeping things, and fowls of the air. A voice spoke to him, entreating him to eat of these creatures, many of which Peter had recognized as common or unclean. And the vision was repeated three times. Peter knew that there was an important meaning in this vision for him. Our lesson today opens with Peter wondering in himself just what it did mean. At that very moment as Peter was turning

this over in his mind, grasping and no doubt praying for the answer. the three men were at the gate, calling and making inquiry for him. And the Holy Spirit spoke to Peter. Oh, how wonderful that God sent the Holy Spirit to be our abiding Comforter and to guide us in our work for Him! The Lord through the Holy Spirit revealed to Peter that he was being sought for and that he was to go with the three men, "doubting nothing." The Lord can reveal His will to us so clearly that there will be no doubts and misgivings. Peter obeyed the Holy Spirit and went with the men back to Caesarea. Cornelius was waiting for him, having called together his relatives and close friends. They were all waiting to hear the message that Peter had for them. By this time the meaning of the vision had become clear to Peter. He was not to call any man common or unclean. These people that he was going to minister here to were really righteous people, cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, even though they had not yet received the full knowledge of such. God counted them clean, and accepted them because they feared Him and worked righteousness that He was pleased with.

—Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What was Peter doing while the men at the gate were making inquiry for him?
2. Who spoke to Peter as he thought on the vision?
3. What did the Holy Spirit tell Peter?
4. What was the import of the words: "doubting nothing"?
5. What did the men say about Cornelius that had not been afore mentioned?
6. According to our lesson, how many day's journey was it from Joppa to Caesarea?
7. Who was waiting there to hear Peter?
8. What did Cornelius do to Peter when he saw Peter?
9. What did Peter do in response to Cornelius and his bowing down before him?
10. What had Peter received by this time as a message from the vision?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

It is wonderful to see the timing of some of the events in our lesson. God was watching over and ordering these advancements in His cause. The vision God gave to Peter came at the precise time when the messengers from Cornelius were approaching Joppa. They arrived at the gate of the tanner's residence

where Peter was lodging at the precise time when Peter was pondering over the vision. When God is working in a matter, He works on both ends. God was working with Peter. He was completely in God's hands to do His will. He was lodging with this tanner, waiting for the Lord to guide Him in what to do and where to go next. God was also (unbeknown to Peter) working with Cornelius in Caesarea. Just how long Cornelius had been praying in this manner and with this need we know not. Oh, how we need to be faithful to God and be ready when He begins to work. God needs vessels to work through, but they must be sanctified, meet (or qualified), and ready for use. Peter was that kind of man. The nets of Galilee were left far behind. He was fishing for souls now, out in the work of his beloved Saviour and Friend. The harvest was ripe and people were hungry for the truth. What a joy filled Peter's heart as he bore witness to God working with souls! Cornelius was hungry for more of God. He was seeking earnestly. And there were other people around that neighborhood who were seeking God, also. He had relatives and close friends who shared with him a hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Oh, the Lord knows everyone who is seeking to know Him! How we need to consecrate ourselves, cut loose for God, and let Him qualify us for his everlasting service for the souls of men. The material things can take such a hold on the heart and mind, and it all is to perish with using. But he that goes forth with the precious seed will gather precious fruit in the bonds of perfect love unto life eternal.

—Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Matt. 5:6.

"It strikes us somewhat strangely at first that there should be a beatitude for dissatisfaction. We know that peace is promised to the Christian, and peace is calm repose and satisfied restfulness. The words hunger and thirst appear to suggest experiences incompatible with rest and peace. But when we think a little more deeply we see that spiritual hunger must form a part of all true Christian experience. Hunger is a mark of health. It is so in physical life — the loss of appetite indicates disease. So a healthy mind is a hungry one; when one becomes satisfied with one's attainments, one ceases to grow. The same is true in spiritual life. If we become satisfied with our faith and love and obedience, and our communion with God, and our consecration to Christ, we have ceased to grow.

"Invalids die often amid plenty; die of starvation — not because they can get no food, but because they have no appetite. There are many professing Christians who are starving their souls in the midst of abundance of spiritual provision, because they have no hunger. There is nothing for which we should pray more earnestly and more importunately than for spiritual longing and desire. It is indeed the very soul of all true prayer. It is the empty hand reached out to receive new and richer gifts from heaven. It is the heart's cry which God hears with acceptance and answers always with more and more of life. It is the ascending angel that climbs the radiant ladder to return on the same bright stairway with blessings from God's very hand. It is the key that unlocks new storehouses of divine goodness and enrichment. It is indeed nothing less than the very life of God in the human soul, struggling to grow up in us into the fulness of the stature of Christ. Such spiritual hunger never fails of blessing."

—Taken from *Come Ye Apart*

The "T" Rail

My father died when I was a small boy. We soon found ourselves running short of the necessities of life, so Mother decided to buy a small farm, and we moved to our new home in Bath County, Kentucky. Our nearest neighbor was Uncle George Williams, who had several children; one was a boy about my age. We boys went down to our new neighbors to get acquainted. We had just gotten there, when I saw a piece of T-rail four or five feet long hanging from a limb of an apple tree. This rail had a hole in one end with a wire run through it, and this wire was around the limb of the tree. The rail was touching nothing.

I asked the boy what it was doing there, and he said that it was their dinner bell. I thought he was kidding me, and said so. He picked up a hammer laying there, and said, "Three taps on the T-rail with the hammer would tell the men in the field that dinner was ready. I wanted to try it, but he said, "Wait until dinner is ready, and then you can try it." When dinner was ready I got the hammer and took hold of the T-rail and hit it. The sound was dead. Nute said, "You grounded it when you took hold of it." He took the hammer and hit the rail three taps, while it swung free, and the message rang clear. Soon we saw the men coming in from the field.

I soon found out that the rail was a message bearer. Two taps would bring Mr. Williams home if he were needed. Five taps meant the house was on fire, and everybody would come running home. We lived at that place three years, then moved away, and I thought no more about the T-rail in the apple tree, until about 40 years later, when the Lord brought it back to my mind, and taught me a lesson on the Church.

I have learned from this T-rail that congregations can become grounded and kill the message. Individuals can do the same. We must be anchored from above, to keep us and our message from being grounded. We need the two witnesses, the Word and the Spirit; they both come down from above. The disciples were earthbound as they could not grasp the teachings of Christ. They were looking for an earthly kingdom, and some of them wanted the best place; one on the right hand, the other on the left hand of Christ. But when the angel took the fire off the golden altar and cast it into the earth (Rev. 8) it burnt the earthbound cords, and the Church got off the ground, and was held above this old world, by that which comes down from heaven, where Christ sits on the right hand of the Father. Oh, brother, it is that which comes down from above that will keep us anchored to the Rock, and keep the message ringing out true and clear. Let's be sure we are anchored on that which entereth into that within the veil. It will hold us clear and true from the grounding things of this old world, and when the gospel hammer hits that gospel T-rail, the message will be heard, and it will be clear. It will bring God's people together, and will be convincing to the lost of the earth. It will bring healing to the sick, comfort to the broken hearted, peace to the troubled soul. Oh, brother, let's check the anchor, and be sure we are anchored from above! When we are held in place by that which comes from above, then, and then only, will the beauty of the Christ be seen in the Church.

Peter, even after he preached that message at Pentecost and then came from the upper room, still had to have that which comes down from above before he would take God's message to the Gentiles, so God gave him a vision while he was on the housetop, and that vision came down from above. He was told to slay and eat. He said, "Not so, Lord, I have never eaten anything common or unclean." God said, "What I have cleansed, call not common or unclean." It took that which came down from above to free Peter from his former teaching, and to prepare him to go to the Gentiles. We are always in

need of that which comes down from above. Christ said, "I am the bread of life," and He came down from above.

—C. S. M.

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September 11, 1988

THE CALL OF CORNELIUS — Part 3

Acts 10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;

38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;

41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

Memory Verse: . . . Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. Acts 10:34, 35.

Central Thought: When Peter preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to Cornelius and those present with him, the Holy Spirit fell upon them for they were hungry for righteousness and were prepared to receive the gift of God.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Our last lesson closed with Peter reaching at last the house of Cornelius where he found a good many waiting to hear his message. He informed them that, although it had been his previous conviction that as a Jew it was not lawful for him to keep company or come unto someone of another nation, God had made him to know that he was not to call any man common or unclean. Therefore he had come without argument as soon as he was sent for. Then he asked Cornelius why he had sent for him. Cornelius told him how that as he was fasting and praying in his house four days previous, an angel had appeared to him and given him clear instructions to send to Joppa for Peter to come. "Immediately therefore," he stated, "I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore we are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." And then Peter began his message which is the beginning of our lesson today. He preached the simple good news of Jesus Christ, how that He was Lord of all, how that being anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, Jesus had gone about doing good, healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with Him. He told how that he, with others, witnessed these things, and were also witnesses of His resurrection from the dead. He told how Jesus was ordained of God to be the Judge of the quick (or living) and the dead, and that all the prophets gave witness that whosoever believeth in Christ would be saved. It is interesting to note that the hearts of these people were so in tune with God that the Holy Spirit filled their hearts as they heard Peter's words. Some of the believing Jews were astonished to behold this. This was a great hurdle for the Church to master. But it was so plain, and Peter was so convinced that God had done all of this, which would help

him in explaining the matter to the apostles and brethren at Jerusalem.

—Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What had Peter perceived in all that had happened?
2. What was the substance of Peter's message to them?
3. What was the word God sent to the children of Israel?
4. What did Peter say that Jesus Christ was?
5. What did he say the anointed Jesus went about doing?
6. What did Peter say that he was, concerning what Christ did?
7. What happened while Peter was preaching?
8. Why were some who were present astonished?
9. What did Peter command them to do?
10. What did they want Peter to do?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

God is surely pleased with people who hunger and thirst after Him. Some people have every chance and opportunity to be saved and established in the Christian life and do not appreciate it or avail themselves. Then there are others who are far off, who do not have immediate access to the gospel, whose hearts are yearning to know the truth. The Lord has commanded the light to shine out of darkness, (2 Corinthians 4:6), but it seems that so many deceived people do not sense their darkness, nor do they recognize the light when it shines. They do not realize nor sense their need. Jesus had to deal with this, also. He told the Jews in John 9:41, "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth." A man who does not sense his danger will not seek a refuge. A person who thinks he is right is not looking for something that will amend his ways. A person who is satisfied is not in quest of something better. "The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet." Proverbs 27:7. A man who senses his ignorance is willing to be taught. The empty heart is seeking to be filled. The weary soul is glad to find rest in Jesus. The condemned soul finds peace and forgiveness a sweet inheritance. The beggar is glad for a crust of bread. What is a castoff to one person can be a treasure to another. A poor man would think a small simple cottage to be like a castle. The hungry heart for Jesus justifies his Master in whatever he does, so delighted is he to have Him for his Friend. The prepared and eager heart needs no urging. This has been

since time began. Mary said, "He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away." Luke 1:53. Blessed are the hungry and thirsty who are yearning for truth, groping for one ray of light. How precious the Lord is to those who look for him.

—Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

When Nicodemus came to Jesus inquiring how to be saved, Jesus told him, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and wither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." John 3:8. There are precious truths to be learned in this statement. "The wind bloweth where it listeth. . ." It is not our discretion as to who receives the Holy Spirit. Just as the wind blows where it wishes, the Spirit of God fills those who meet His criteria. Just as you feel the wind blowing in places other than your own back yard, God's Spirit is working in people other than our own personal friends and church acquaintances. The Holy Spirit has a world-wide mission. No more than someone can control the wind can man put a corner on the Holy Spirit. It is evident by Peter's attitude that he tried to do this before God dealt with him. It is to his credit, however, and those who accompanied him to Cornelius' house, that they willingly discarded their preconceived ideas and gladly accepted the Gentiles as their brethren in the Lord. ". . . Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." If God accepts those who manifest the fruits of the Spirit in their lives, we can do no less than the same.

—Wayne Murphey



September 18, 1988

**PETER GIVES AN ACCOUNT OF HIS VISIT
TO THE GENTILES**

Acts 11:1 And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.

2 And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,

3 Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.

4 But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,

5 I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:

6 Upon the which when I fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

7 And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.

8 But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.

9 But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

10 And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.

11 And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me.

12 And the spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house:

15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.

16 Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

17 Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?

18 When they heard these things, they held their peace,

and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

Memory Verse: For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us. Ephesians 2:14.

Central Thought: At first Peter was criticized for going to the Gentiles, but after he explained what happened and how God manifested His glory in it all, the brethren rejoiced that God had opened salvation's door to the Gentiles.

LESSON BACKGROUND

After Peter had tarried a number of days with the new converts at Caesarea, he returned to Jerusalem. The apostles and brethren there had already heard about what had happened. This action that Peter had taken of going in to people other than Jews had aroused the displeasure of some of the believing Jews. Right away after his return they began to dispute with him about what he had done. Surely, as Adam Clarke observes, this shows that in no way did the Church or its leaders esteem Peter as the chief of the apostles, or, as erroneously taught, as the vicar of Christ, the first pope. To do what Peter had done, that is, to go in and keep company with a non-Jew, was no small offense in these early Christian's eyes, not yet enlightened to the fullness of God's working. But their brotherly love for Peter allowed him to make a full explanation for his actions, which he kindly did. As we see, there were six brethren that had accompanied him from Joppa to Caesarea, and it is very evident that these same six brethren had come with him and were present at Jerusalem at this time. In his account as to what took place, Peter included some more detail. When he recognized the outpouring of the Spirit upon those eager souls at Caesarea, he remembered that Jesus had told them that they would be baptized with the Holy Ghost. (Acts 1:5). It could be that in the minds of the apostles this promise of the Holy Spirit was to be only for them and the believing Jews. But when he witnessed the gift of God being bestowed upon those Gentiles, he recognized right away that God was opening the door of His blessings beyond the Jewish community. "What was I," he said, that I could withstand God?" Of course, no man can really withstand God, but men try to do so when they refuse to accept His wisdom and the workings of His Spirit. Thank the Lord, the brethren were satisfied and glorified God, rejoicing that the door of faith had been opened to the Gentiles.

—Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of report had the apostles and brethren up at Jerusalem heard?
2. Who contended with Peter and what was their dispute with him about?
3. What did Peter do about their contention and accusation?
4. What are the things revealed in Peter's account here not mentioned in previous accounts?
5. What did Peter think of when he witnessed the Holy Spirit falling upon those at Caesarea?
6. What was his reaction to this?
7. How did the brethren respond to his report?
8. What did they glorify God about?
9. How was this opening to the Gentiles going to affect their status as Jews?
10. What kind of wall was the gospel tearing down here?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

God's judgments are unsearchable and His ways are past finding out. (Romans 11:33). His ways are above the ways of man. Man is so prone to work his own thoughts and ideas into the religious enterprise. Man likes to get his own program going, trying to conjugate or work with God. But every so often God takes off on one of His unique paths, leaving bewildered man to grope for awhile. Blind unbelief and humanistic concepts will miss the mark. But the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the faithful will bring the workings of God to light. He is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain. What we have to watch and be careful about is being hasty and too quick to judge and act. Man can hinder the Holy Spirit and hobble His free exercise to work with souls. We cannot trace all the workings of God with souls. Elijah thought all was lost and was ready to die and give it up, but God informed him that he had reserved to Himself seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed their knees to the image of Baal. (Romans 11:4). Ecclesiastes 11:5 cautions us that just as we know not the way of the Spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child, even so we know not the works of God who maketh all. Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counsellor? The answer is obvious. He did not need our ideas then, and He does not need them now. God considers people in His ways. If He has to hold off one group of humanity while He works with another, some one needs to learn patience.

The Psalmist said in 77:19, "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known." Although we have His word, yet God moves by His Spirit often in ways hard to understand. Let us keep an open heart and a submission to His will, knowing that He knows what He is doing.

—Leslie Busbee

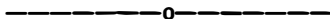
FOOD FOR THOUGHT

It should be our business, as children of God, to break down every barrier that the devil tries to erect between those who believe in Christ. There are many different types of barriers. Often the devil uses imaginations to erect them. It is easy to imagine the intent and purpose of a person, and it is hard to know them.

The devil is also very proficient at erecting barriers through gossip. One Aesop fable aptly depicts the way gossip works and its result. A lion often prowled about a pasture where three bulls grazed together. He had tried, without success, to lead one or the other of them to the edge of the pasture. He had even attempted a direct attack, only to see them form a ring so that from whichever direction he approached he was met by their horns. Then a plan began to form in the lion's mind. Secretly he started spreading evil and slanderous reports of one bull against the other. The three bulls, distrustfully began to avoid one another and each withdrew to a different part of the pasture to graze. Of course, this was exactly what the lion wanted. One by one he fell upon the bulls, and so made easy prey of them all.

The way to break down barriers is to have interaction one with another. Jesus advised that if we have something against our brother, we should go to him and be reconciled. (Matt. 5:23, 24). Many times when the truth is known, there is very little substantiation to accusations or preconceived opinions. It was when Peter and the other brethren went down to Cornelius' house, worshipped and had companionship with them, that they found out the Gentiles had favor with God also.

—Wayne Murphey



September 25, 1988

FURTHER OUTREACH AND A FAMINE FORETOLD

Acts 11:19 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent for Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

24 For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

25 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:

26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

27 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be a great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

29 Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea:

30 Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Memory Verse: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28.

Central Thought: Because of persecution, the work of the gospel spread out farther still from Jerusalem, centralizing more in the northern part of Israel at Antioch where the disciples were first called Christians.

Word Definitions: *Christian:* A follower of Christ, one who is Christ-like. *Dearth:* Famine, lack of food.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Phenice was to the north of Joppa, taking in the regions of Tyre and Sidon. Antioch was on farther north, while Cyprus was an island out to the west in the Mediterranean Sea. To these places was the gospel taken as the disciples scattered after the persecution arose concerning Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Some of the disciples were from Cyrene, which was situated down by the northern coast of Africa. The hand of the Lord was with these brethren and many believed the gospel and turned to the Lord. From the Church at Jerusalem came Brother Barnabas of whom we have already heard. He was originally from Cyprus, a Levite, whose original name was Joses, but was surnamed Barnabas, which means the son of consolation. (Acts 4:36). He had been a great blessing to the Church, having sold land and given the proceeds freely. He well lived up to the name given him by the apostles. We see him come to Antioch where his sweet and loving spirit anointed by the Holy Spirit was a great blessing to souls. Having also been instrumental in helping the Church at Jerusalem to accept Saul when he was converted, he decided to go to Tarsus and look him up. Saul had gone to Tarsus, his native city, no doubt where he could be protected as a Roman citizen. Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch where the Church was thriving. Here the name "Christian" was applied to the disciples. It is a name that means much to take and to live up to. In response to the warning given by the prophet Agabus of the coming famine, the Church rose to meet the need, choosing Barnabas and Saul to bear the means sent to help the brethren in Judea.

—Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Who did they first preach the gospel to?
2. When the Word was preached to the Grecians, how did they respond?
3. Where did the Church send Barnabas?
4. What did he do when he came to Antioch?
5. What kind of a man was he?
6. Why did Barnabas go to Tarsus?
7. What did he and Saul do at Antioch?
8. What did they call the disciples at Antioch, and why?

9. What did the prophet Agabus prophesy?
10. How did the Church at Antioch respond to the need?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

The gospel of Jesus Christ presents the answer to man's most desperate need, the salvation of his never-dying soul. It affords deliverance from the power of sin and transgression, and a victorious life over sin. It gives hope beyond this life, a hope of a home in the glory world forever. It gives a joy and a fellowship in the heart with the Saviour, a living presence of comfort and peace not found any other way. Mankind who has been disappointed by the vanities of the physical and material life is hungry for something better. Thus the hearts of men respond to the love offered them from the glorious truth of the Lord Jesus who loved them so much that He shed His blood and died in their place. The men and women who bear the precious seed of the gospel must reflect its glorious worth in their lives. God is not interested in communicating His tidings of grace in a vessel that dishonors His name. How many times along the course of history has a professed minister failed to manifest the purity and standard of life that the Saviour upholds! It is a serious thing to profess to be a bearer of the glad tidings of the gospel. Once in a village a man arose teaching about Christ. The people began to show an interest because this man was telling them more than anyone else had ever told about the gospel. Things seemed to be progressing until one day this man was missing and missing with him was one of the young girls of the village. The gospel was dealt a severe blow. Whosoever goes forth to preach must take heed in their every day lives to live up to the standard of the gospel. Along with the strictness of the gospel there must be consolation and assurance of Christ.

—Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Something about a real genuine experience of salvation causes one to enjoy being in the company of others who have the same experience. This is the automatic blending of the Spirit of God in one individual with the Spirit of God in another. He cannot deny Himself. It is this blending that we recognize as Christian fellowship, and only the Spirit working in both hearts can produce it. Just because folks meet together in the same building and call each other brother or sister does not necessarily mean that there is fellowship flowing from heart to heart, but if the Spirit of God is working

with free right-of-way in each heart there is no way to prevent a mutual blending. Fellowship is based on confidence and unity requires confidence and fellowship. When confidence breaks down there cannot be any Christian fellowship or unity for how can you fellowship a man in whom you have no confidence? Barnabas loved Saul and had confidence in him, so he sought him out that they might labor together.

—C. W. Wilson
(Written in 1970)

“The Door Shall Be Shut”

The porters were crying, “Take your seats for Derby and the South!” The great terminus buzzed with life, and passengers hurrying to and fro hastened to get into the train. Good-byes were said, last handshakes and farewell kisses given—the guard lifted his flag to wave the “All Clear” signal for the train to steam out of the station.

It was just at this moment that one of the passengers seated in the last carriage saw a man come running through the iron gates on to the platform. He was breathless, and red in the face from his efforts to reach the train before it left. He made one last effort, and sprang into the carriage just as the train gathered up speed, and with a shrill whistle, puffed its way out. The man sank exhausted into his seat in the corner of the carriage, a porter slammed the door, and the passenger who had been an interested spectator of these happenings, said, with a smile, “And the door was shut!”

The newcomer glanced at the speaker, and then buried himself behind a newspaper. Not another word passed between them for the rest of the journey. But with every puff of the engine the words spoken repeated themselves in the brain of Andrew Floyd. “And the door was shut—and the door was shut—and the door was shut!”

Vainly he tried to read his paper—it seemed to him that the words not only repeated themselves in his ears, but danced before his eyes. “And the door was shut!” Behind the sheltering shade of the paper he went back many years. He saw himself sitting by the side of his mother in a country chapel. A white-haired preacher was speaking from the text which contained those very words: “And the door was shut.” The small boy listened intently. The preacher had a vivid way of telling a story, and he ended his sermon on the parable of the Ten Virgins by saying, “The gospel train is fast

filling; the last person will soon be in it; and then can you tell how you would feel, not to be just in time, but just **too late**? To be one who shall cry, 'Lord, Lord, open to us?' when the only answer will be, 'I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.' " Matt. 7:23.

Through the years, buried beneath the hurry and cares of this life these words had lain forgotten, but not lost, in the depths of the memory of that boy, now grown to be a man with a family of his own. Andrew Floyd looked out the window, but he did not see the beautiful green fields, the pretty country cottages, nor the grime-blackened towns through which the express puffed its way. Instead he saw a hill in far-away Palestine, and climbing that hill a band of men, followed by a motley crowd. The band of soldiers made the three prisoners with them to lie down on the three bare wooden crosses which they had carried to the summit of that hill, and then with relentless cruelty, they had nailed them to the wood. The crosses had been lifted by rough hands, put into holes already dug for them, and the earth piled up around.

Who was the central Figure lifted up on that ugly cross? Yes, he knew it was the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God—and as Andrew Floyd gazed upon the silent, suffering Form, the tears began to course unheeded down his cheeks. **His** sin had been borne on that cross — and how ungrateful he had been! All these years, and he had never taken refuge within the Door which had been opened for the safety of sinners—for his safety that day when Christ, the Son of God, loved "unto the end."

"And the door was shut." Yes, it might have been shut, and if it had been, he, Andrew Floyd, would have been shut out. for as yet he had never thanked that silent Sufferer for dying for his sins, nor taken Him as his own personal Saviour. But he would do so now! Not another moment should pass until he knew himself to be safely **inside** the Door! Andrew Floyd shut his eyes, and for the first time for many years, he prayed. With sorrow in his heart he poured out his repentance and grief, and gave himself unreservedly to the Saviour.

So occupied was he that he did not notice the stopping of the train. It was only when he lowered his paper a short time later, that he saw the man who had awakened his soul had left the train. He was sorry—he would have liked to tell him that he had brought a soul to Christ through his words! Still, it could not be helped; perhaps some day he would see him again.

Andrew Floyd never met his fellow passenger—however, he did have the joy of knowing that his words had awakened Andrew's soul, and brought him to the Saviour. Two years later, away in the far East, where his work for the Lord had brought him, Andrew Floyd met a friend, who was also a friend of the man who had been sitting in the carriage when Andrew came hurrying into it on that memorable day. This friend was on his way back to England, and to him Andrew related the foregoing events which led to his conversion.

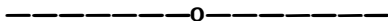
So struck was Captain McIntyre with the story that he used it in giving an address on reaching England. In his audience sat his other friend—the man who had spoken the words! After meeting he spoke to Captain McIntyre, and learned from him what his simple words had done in bringing another to Christ. What joy filled his heart as he listened to the story as related to his friend by Andrew Floyd, now in the service of the Lord in that remote country!

Friend, may I repeat those same words to you? **"The door was shut."** Today that Door stands open, but one day it will be shut. On which side of it—of **Him**—will **you** be found? Oh, the madness and danger of delaying your salvation to the last moment! May you hear His voice, and enter in through the Door without delay!

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in." Rev. 3:20. That is Christ, your Saviour, waiting patiently at the door of your heart. But listen again—

"I am the door," says the Saviour, "by **Me** if any man enter in, he shall be saved." John 10:9. Will you not unlock the door of your heart, and confessing your sin and your need of salvation, invite the Saviour to come in? If you do, then at that very moment you will enter in through the other Door, which is Christ Himself, and will know the joy of sins forgiven, and of having received the gift of everlasting life!

—T. Stubbs



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