

Lesson 1: The Conversion of Paul

Text: Acts 9:1-9; 18b-22

Theme: Paul, converted by God to preach Christ.

Background and setting:

The time of this event is about A.D. 33, three years after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension. We are here introduced to Saul, who at this point persecuted instead of professed Christ. The name Saul was Paul's given Hebrew name, while Paul was his Roman or Latin name.

Notes on the text:

Verse 1 - The question arises how Paul could have "murdered" the disciples of Christ in view of the Roman restriction on capital punishment (Jn. 18:31). The answer may be found in the fact that there was one loop-hole in that restriction. In 6 A.D. when Judea became a Roman province, the Jewish Sanhedrin (senate or council) was deprived of capital jurisdiction, with one exception. They had the right to stone anyone who had violated the sanctity of the temple. This is no doubt why at Jesus' trial the charge was brought forward that He had said He would destroy the temple and then build it in three days (Mt. 26:61). Stephen was accused of blaspheming the temple in Acts 6:13, and was later stoned. The Sanhedrin could have justified his death on that false accusation. In Acts 26:11 Paul states that he at one time forced believers to "blaspheme," which led to their death. It could be that this blasphemy referred to the temple. Two other suggestions have been made as to why Pilate allowed this persecution. He may have simply closed his eyes to the matter with the hope that thereby peace would be maintained, or perhaps he was absent during the months the persecutions took place. The official seat for Roman governing was Caesarea, not Jerusalem, and the Roman governors spent most of their time in Caesarea along the rather pleasant Mediterranean coastline.

Verse 2 - How could Paul go to Dam-

ascus and bring back prisoners from another country? When the Jewish state won independence under the Hasmonaeans almost two hundred years earlier, Rome demanded that the countries surrounding Judea grant them the rights and privileges of a sovereign state, which included the right of extradition. The Roman ambassador to Ptolemy VIII of Egypt sent a letter in 142 B.C., to Ptolemy stating, "If any pestilent men have fled to you from their country, hand them over to Simon the high priest, that he may punish them according to their law." These rights were renewed for Judea by Julius Caesar in 47 B. C. after Judea had become a vassal-state of Rome. Because many Christians from Judea had no doubt fled to Damascus, Paul could obtain authority to go there and bring them back for punishment. "They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or Me." Jn. 16:2-3

Verses 3-7 - Some have tried to explain this appearance of Jesus to Paul in natural ways, suggesting that perhaps Paul, like Luther, was almost struck by lightning, or that he had an epileptic seizure which then threw him to the ground. This is simply not true. It is quite evident from our text as well as Paul's later accounts in Acts 22: 4-16 and 26:12-18 that Jesus did personally appear to Paul. Note that two things are happening. Paul is in the process of being converted, and then secondly he is being called. His conversion was the result of Jesus' word through the working of the Spirit. His call took the form of Jesus' command to go to Damascus where he would receive further instructions.

Verses 8-9 - Damascus is said to be the most continuously inhabited city in the world. It lies about 130 miles north and just

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a bit east of Jerusalem. It is about 50 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea. It lies in a fertile plain which was noted for its fruits then, as today. See also v. 17 which is especially valuable to understand Paul's conversion: he was not comforted by God until Ananias spoke the marvelous word "**Brother Saul...**"

Verse 18 - Like the Eunuch of Ethiopia before him, and people such as Lydia and the Jailer of Philippi after him, Paul asked to be baptized after his conversion. Baptism served to confirm and strengthen his new-found faith in Jesus.

Verses 19-22 - The natural response of faith in Jesus is to live for Jesus. Saul the persecutor became Paul the preacher as he confounded everyone, friend and foe alike, with very powerful sermons proving that Jesus was the promised Christ.

Discussion:

Review explanation to the Third Article. "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe..." Other unlikely converts in the Scriptures: Thief on cross, woman taken in adultery, Zacchaeus; can you think of more? Any modern day examples? Why are we left here on earth after we are baptized/converted?

Application:

1. Conversion--the work of the Spirit - If ever there were an example that conversion is not the decision of man, the conversion of Paul is that example. Paul was intent upon persecution, even murder. It took the intervention of Jesus Himself--His Word and the work of the Holy Spirit to bring Paul to a recognition of his personal sinfulness and need for forgiveness. (Cf. also God converting Adam and Eve hiding in the Garden.)

2. Conversion--don't rule anyone out - It is quite easy for us to make judgments with regard to people that they either will or will not be interested in the gospel or receptive to it. Such judgments often times hinder

our personal mission efforts. If you consider the reaction of Ananias in Acts 9:10-17, you can see that no one would ever have considered Paul a likely candidate for conversion, especially after what he did to Stephen. Yet he was God's chosen vessel. Whom do you know that you may have written off, so to speak, with regard to your mission efforts?

3. Baptism--faith's natural desire - Jesus instituted baptism as one of two sacraments by which we might be strengthened in our faith, love, and hope of salvation. It is natural for those who come to faith to desire baptism in order to confirm and strengthen their faith in God's promise of forgiveness and life. Baptism should never be considered merely an external act of man, but a precious act of God on behalf of man, whereby He offers, gives, and seals the forgiveness of sins.

Main Application:

Conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is faith's natural desire and confession is faith's natural response.

4. Confession--faith's natural response - It is true that at times Christians may be afraid to confess their faith, but faith's natural response to the gospel is to rejoice in that gospel and share it with others. Paul was certainly led to do that. Notice, however, that before Paul preached, he spent some time learning (verse 19). Much of our fear of speaking about Jesus may be insecurity as to our knowledge. Let us study the Scriptures, so as to be certain of what God has done for us; then we will find joy in expressing it to others!

Bible passages:
Acts 16:31;
John 3:5;
I Cor. 12:3b;
Jeremiah 1:5

Hymn verses:
L.H. 37:1-2

Lesson 2: Philip and the Ethiopian

Text: Acts 8:26-40

Theme: Philip instructed by God to speak His Word.

Background and setting:

One source suggests a general time frame of six to seven years following the great day of Pentecost. It certainly takes place during the time of the persecution which claimed the life of Stephen the martyr, cf. Acts 7-8. Acts 8:1 speaks of a great persecution which caused the Christians to be scattered abroad. Acts 8:5 speaks of Philip going down to the city of Samaria and preaching Christ, and then (cf. Acts 8:26) being directed by the angel of the Lord to the place where he would meet the Ethiopian in the desert between Jerusalem and Gaza, cf. Acts 8:26.

Notes on the text:

Verse 26 - The Lord arranges the meeting between Philip and the Ethiopian. Gaza: southernmost of the five Philistine cities, on the main road between Mesopotamia and Egypt, southwest from Jerusalem, approximately 50 miles.

Verse 27 - Ethiopia: west side of the Red Sea on the African continent. Ethiopian eunuch - (emasculated), A man of political prominence and authority. He had come to Jerusalem to worship.

Verse 28 - The Ethiopian is reading from the Old Testament book of Isaiah while making the return trip home.

Verse 29 - The Holy Spirit directs Philip to the chariot of the Ethiopian. The specific manner in which this directive is given by the Holy Spirit is not revealed.

Verse 30 - Philip hastens to the chariot. Mission work, the saving of souls, is urgent work. Hearing the Ethiopian reading from the book of Isaiah, Philip inquires whether or not he understands what he is reading. Philip wants to teach the Ethiopian the Word of God.

Verse 31 - The Ethiopian invites Philip to come and sit with him. He is eager for this opportunity to have someone help him

understand the Word.

Verses 32-33 - Philip found that the Ethiopian man had been reading from that beautiful gospel chapter, Isaiah 53, which, though written hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, in great detail speaks of the suffering and death of Christ for our sins.

Verse 34 - The Ethiopian now asks Philip if in this chapter Isaiah is speaking of himself or another man. He did not as yet fully understand what he was reading.

Verse 35 - God had sent the disciple Philip to do what he would now do: preach Jesus unto him! This is what mission work is all about.

Verse 36 - There is a stream nearby, even though they are in a desert region (God provides for His people), and the Ethiopian, rejoicing in this fuller knowledge given to him, requests baptism. Either Philip had spoken to him about baptism, or he had heard of it or witnessed it on an earlier occasion.

Verse 37 - Prior to baptism, Philip asks for a confession of faith in Jesus. Philip hears the following response from the man: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (NKJV) The Word has been preached, and God the Holy Spirit has worked saving faith. No work bears greater fruit than mission work!

Verse 38 - In obedience to the Word of Jesus, the Ethiopian is baptized. Baptism is not honored by all. It should be! It is a means of grace. Such a blessing from our God should be held in the highest esteem. cf. yesterday's lesson on Paul's baptism.

Verse 39 - The Holy Spirit "caught" Philip away (again, manner not specified). We can say, though, that Philip was taken away in a miraculous manner. Our God is ever capable of miracles, as Scripture makes clear time and again. There is no indication that the Ethiopian man was alarmed by this. Quite the contrary, he went on his way rejoicing. His faith was not

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based upon Philip, but upon Jesus.

Verse 40 - Philip was next found at Azotus, some thirty miles to the north of Gaza. The Lord evidently had more missionary work for Philip, for "he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea." (NKJV)

Discussion:

All are in need of Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin! Philip was actively engaged as a missionary for Christ. Philip worked mightily in the Spirit. It is evident that he had a divine call for this purpose. All believers are called to be witnesses for Jesus, missionaries for Jesus. We may not have experiences exactly like those of Philip, but we may speak to others about Jesus whenever and wherever we have the opportunity. We use the same Word that Philip used, and it is, of course, capable of the same results: producing faith! All people need Jesus. "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" John 14:6 (NKJV)

An angel of the Lord directed Philip to the area where the Ethiopian man was traveling, and the Holy Spirit directed him to the chariot of the man. The Lord goes to great lengths so that we might be brought to the faith. We might be reminded of how great the love of God was in providing for our salvation. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." - John 3:16 (NKJV)

The Ethiopian man had come to Jerusalem to worship. He believed the God revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures was the true God. It was a notable devotion that would prompt a journey of that distance for the purpose of worship.

Application:

The Ethiopian man was reading from the book of Isaiah. Someone had shared the Scriptures with him. We do mission work by sharing the Bible with people and telling them about Jesus. "So then faith comes by

hearing and hearing by the Word of God." Romans 10:17 (NKJV)

The Ethiopian man had already had some earlier contact with the Word. He was eager to learn more. The Holy Spirit prompts this eagerness, and causes faith to grow. Like Philip, we too, will depend upon the Holy Spirit to give people faith when we share the Bible with them and tell them about Jesus.

Main Application:

We do mission work by sharing the Bible with people and telling them about Jesus. Baptism for the unbaptized is an important part of mission work.

Philip needed to know the Bible so that he could teach it to others. The better we know the Bible, the more we will be able to teach it to others. Of course, we will always want to pray that the Holy Spirit will bless our efforts. "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." I Peter 3:15 (NKJV)

As the Ethiopian man desired to be baptized, so baptism for the unbaptized is an important part of mission work. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Matt. 28:19 (NKJV)

Luther's Small Catechism: Baptism

Brief Synopsis of Philip's life: The Philip of our story is Philip the Evangelist, not Philip the Apostle. He was one of the seven deacons appointed in Acts 6 (along with Stephen). The persecution by Saul probably brought his ministry in the church of Jerusalem to an end, and Philip probably fled to Samaria. The Lord led Philip to the Eunuch of Ethiopia. The last we read of Philip, the apostle Paul visited him on one of his missionary journeys. At this time, Philip had instructed his family and raised four daughters who had the gift of prophecy (Acts 21:8-9).

Bible passages:

Ps. 119:105;
II Tim. 3:15;
Isa. 55:1-11,
Rom. 10:8-18

Hymn verses:

L.H. 301, 283,
512 (1-2, 5-6),
506

Lesson 3: The Stoning of Stephen

Text: Acts 6:8; 7:51-60

Theme:
Stephen,
strengthened
by God to
confess unto
death.

Background and setting:

Love and harmony reigned supreme within the church at Jerusalem, and at first the enemies of Christ were not permitted to harm these Christians in any way. The Lord preserved Peter and John during their first arrest. All the Apostles were then imprisoned by the elders of the Jews. Again the Lord miraculously intervened and sent His angel to open the prison doors and set them free. The next day the Lord moved the highly respected Rabbi Gamaliel to advise against passing the death sentence upon the disciples. However, the Apostles were whipped and again strictly forbidden to preach Christ crucified. But strengthened by the Risen Savior they fearlessly continued to preach Jesus Christ "daily in the Temple and every house." In our lesson today, we hear of the first major persecution of Christians and of the first martyr for Christ, Stephen.

Notes on the text:

Acts 6:8 - How was Stephen able to do great wonders among the people? (By the power of God.) Why did those Jews need to have Stephen falsely arrested? (Because he was innocent and had been telling the truth.) What did Stephen do in order to show them that they were sinning and in danger of losing their faith? (He preached a sermon telling them of the prophecies and promises about Jesus the Messiah.) Stephen preached the gospel to his enemies.

Acts 7:51-53 - Why did Stephen have to use the law and show them their sins? (They refused to believe and would not face the truth.) What did he rightly accuse them of? (1. Resisting the Holy Spirit and rejecting the prophets who preached about the coming of the Messiah; 2. murdering the Messiah when He came.) What did Stephen hope the Law would do for these

men? (Make them realize their sin and need for forgiveness.) Stephen preached the law to his enemies.

Acts 7:54-58 - What did Stephen's admonitions do to these Jews? (It made them terribly angry and mad with hate.) What does this show us about their souls? (That they had no love for God.) Why did Stephen tell His enemies about the vision of heaven that God allowed him to see? (He wanted them to repent of their sin and turn to the Lord for forgiveness.) How can we tell that their hearts were hardened against God? (They stoned Stephen for speaking the truth about God.) Whom did God send to help Stephen? (Holy Spirit) Why do you think the Jews wanted to kill Stephen? (Because he had told them the truth and the truth made them feel guilty and ashamed.) Stephen shared God's vision with his enemies.

Acts 7:58-60 - At this time who was among those hate-filled Jews whom we now know and love as Paul the Apostle (Saul)? What was he doing there? Why? (Holding the coats of those stoning Stephen. He was a dedicated Pharisee who believed in his own goodness and that the promised Messiah had not come yet to make Israel a great nation. He truly felt men like Stephen were blasphemers.) What does it mean to stone someone? (to throw stones at them until they die from the repeated blows) Where did the method of stoning originate? (From God's command in Lev. 24:16 and 23.) Stephen showed his strong faith in Jesus to provide everlasting life by saying what words? (Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.) What do Stephen's last words show us about him? (That he loved his Savior enough to forgive his enemies and to love those that hated him.) Why did Stephen believe that God would take his soul to heaven? (Because God promised salvation through faith in Jesus, and God

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always keeps His promises) Stephen cared for the salvation of the souls of his enemies--even unto death.

Discussion:

1. Forgiveness of sins is Jesus' greatest gift to us for two reasons. It makes us his children and it gives us the blessing of eternal life with Him in heaven. Jesus came to earth to live and die in order to give us His forgiveness. His resurrection sealed this blessing for us. To Jesus this forgiveness was most important. Remember what He said to the paralyzed man lowered through the roof, even before He healed His body? "Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you." Jesus forgave the thief on the cross when He said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." To those who had loved Jesus all their lives and those who just come to Him--Jesus forgave their sins. But Jesus loves all. He forgave the sins of His enemies too--for He died for the sins of all. He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Stephen, like Jesus, shows how to forgive and love our enemies.

2. We often think we are very brave, but when we have to do what we say we can do, very often we fail. We often boast, but when the time comes to prove what we boast about, we often fail. Remember how Peter boasted that he would always be near Jesus' side and never leave! He left! He ran away and denied Jesus that Thursday night and Friday morning. God gave to Stephen the courage and strength not to be ashamed but to speak up for Jesus and for the truth even to his death.

3. Stephen was human and thus weak and sinful. On his own, he never could have stood up for Jesus in the face of these angry men. But by depending on Jesus, he received Jesus' strength and was able to be a faithful witness. Stephen depended on God for the miracles he did and for the right words to say. He depended on God for

courage and bravery in the face of danger, not to be ashamed of Jesus out of fear for his life. Finally, Stephen depended on God to keep His promise that He would take him to heaven at death. He depended on God's forgiveness not only for himself, but for his enemies also, that their hearts might be turned back to God. Stephen depended on God for all things.

4. God gave Stephen a strong ability to preach the truth about Jesus even when this made others angry. God blessed him with a strong faith to make him brave in front of his enemies. God also gave him a forgiving heart to forgive those who hated him, just as God had forgiven him. Because God loved Stephen so much, he also gave the best blessing to him--life everlasting in heaven. God blessed Stephen with a strong faith in his Savior and his Salvation.

5. Presentation--tell the story all the way through without discussion. Review and discuss--retell the story in parts and ask the questions that correspond to each part.

Main Application:

Only the blood and righteousness of His Son can save and wash away the darkness of sin. We must ask God each day to keep us faithful to Him.

Application:

1. We have many enemies because we are God's children. Those who hate God will hate us. How should we react when they show their hatred by their words and actions against us? It would be easy to turn around and give hate back to them. But this is not Jesus' way, for it would harm their souls' chance for salvation even more. Only God's love in Jesus will heal their hateful hearts. It is up to us to show them that love, even though they are treating us with evil. We can love them because God loves them. We want them to come to the knowledge of the truth because God does.

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We want them to be saved because God does. We want to show them what Jesus would show, in order to help them. Anger and hatred only make matters worse. Pray to God to give you the strength to love your enemies. The love of Jesus is our greatest and best weapon against their hate and evil.

2. Like Stephen, we are human and sinful. As soon as we try to get along without God, we have problems. The Jews didn't feel they needed a Messiah. They were trying to be obedient to the Law and felt they could save themselves that way. We too sometimes think we are good enough to get along without Christ--that God will accept us because of the good things we do. But God only accepts us because of Christ's goodness--not ours. Only the blood and righteousness of His Son can save and wash away the darkness of sin. We must depend on Him to be saved. That's why he came to die and rise-- He wants us to depend on Him!

3. God loves us as much as he loved Stephen. These same blessings that He gave to Stephen He also gives to us. Through these blessings of God's Word, we are able to bravely tell others about Jesus, to depend on Him ourselves, to forgive others when they do wrong to us, and finally to live in heaven with Jesus forever. We must ask God each day to keep us faithful to Him and thank Him for these special blessings. (Get the children to talk about how each of these blessings has already happened or will happen in their everyday lives.)

Bible passages:

Mt. 5:44-45a;

Rev. 2:10;

Jn. 15:5;

II Tim. 4:18;

Ps. 91:11

Catechism

**references: 8th
commandment;
third and fifth
petitions**

Hymn verses:

215 (1-3); 289

(1-2); 370 (1, 4)

Lesson 4: Peter and his dream from God

*Text: Acts 10:9-16;
34-40; 42-43*

Theme: Peter sent by God to witness to all people.

Background and setting:

Cornelius was in charge of the Roman fortress at Caesarea, the seat of the governor of Judea. Caesarea like Joppa is along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Caesarea is about 35 miles north of Joppa. Cornelius was over the Italian Cohort, one tenth of a legion, which actually amounted to 600 men or more, plus auxiliary cavalry units. It was probably called "Italian" because it was mustered in Italy, of Roman citizens.

Cornelius was a proselyte (convert) to Judaism. In contrast to the normal Roman and Gentiles, who worshiped Jupiter, Mercury, Venus, the Emperor, as well as a host of other gods, this man had forsaken the pagan notion of many gods and identified with the living God, the One God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This was a tremendous step that very obviously set the man apart from his associates in every day matters, such as simply not beginning every meal with a libation (pouring out some of the wine) to the gods. This chapter describes (v. 2, 22) that he was so generous in appreciation for the knowledge of the one, living God, that all the Jews respected him, a Gentile. That was unusual to say the least. The words in verse 3 "devout man and one that feared God" clearly show his conversion. The adjective "devout" is used also in v. 7 about the soldier whom he sent. This word is used in Acts 13:43, 16:14, 17:4, 17, and 18:7 designating Gentile converts to Judaism. The Greek word for "feared God" is used in Acts 10:22, 35, 13:16, 27) in a similar sense.

In answer to His prayers and works, God came to Cornelius with a message: "seek Peter." Why? Cornelius knew about the one God and His revealed Truth, even the promise of a coming Messiah, one anointed to save. However, though Peter's words later imply that Cornelius too must have heard some things about Jesus, he did not understand that Jesus was that promised Messiah and all that it meant for him. Notice that Cornelius did not just send

anyone. He sent two of his close servants and a soldier who shared his faith (v. 7 devout).

Notice also in v. 27 that many had come together, so it would appear that Cornelius was very actively sharing his faith, perhaps even meeting with others regularly to worship God in his home.

Notes on the text:

Verse 9 - Meanwhile God must teach the new teacher. Peter was not qualified to found this new congregation. Why? The Holy Spirit had used his powerful sermon about Christ to convert 3000 on Pentecost, hadn't He? Peter was not ready to embrace a Gentile as an equal brother in the LORD. A national prejudice had probably been trained into him from youth. The Law of God itself had taught him to separate from the Gentiles.

This is not the first time that God chose someone for a task that that person did not think he could do. Moses thought he was 40 years too old. Gideon thought they needed more power instead of less. Jonah was unwilling to preach to Ninevah. What about you? God set out to prepare Peter as He will you. How did He do it? God didn't just say "Go!" He taught him about Himself. He revealed Himself to Peter. Peter saw a vision while he was asleep on the rooftop. The roofs there were usually flat. Sometimes they were made of tiles that could be picked up (Mt. 9). Dining, conversing, and even sleeping on the roof was common in summer, for it was their form of air conditioning.

Verses 10-16 - In the vision there were unclean animals in the sheet. (For a definition of clean vs. unclean animals, see Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.) God's command was to kill and eat. Peter was to have another lesson in three's, as in his denial (Mt. 26:34) and His restoration to the apostolic office (John 21:5-7). It is probably hard for us to imagine that Peter could THREE times say "Not so Lord..." (v. 14) when each time God so clearly declared "What God has cleansed, you must not call

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common.” (v. 15) We need to apply this to ourself that God may teach us to regard all souls as dear to God. Peter had been religiously trained to eat according to Lev. 11. Animals with a parted hoof and that chewed the cud could be eaten. But not camel or rabbit because--though they chewed the cud--they do not have a divided hoof. Nor pork, for though swine have a divided hoof, they do not chew the cud. They could eat animals from the water that had fins and scales, but not frogs, catfish, bullheads, turtles...There were restrictions on birds and much more. Although health purposes may have been a side benefit (e.g. pork and some of the others were forbidden, because their cooking and preserving methods did not kill botulism, trichinosis, etc.) yet they were not the main reason. The purpose was to make them a people set apart unto God, to fence them off from the godless heathen till Christ would come. (Ex. 19:5,6; Lev. 19:45; Gal. 3:19, 23). God Himself, who had written out this Old Testament menu was now tearing it up. Peter was shocked, dismayed, befuddled, confused. God was teaching Peter that the Law was annulled in Christ Jesus through His death and resurrection. Jesus set us free from the curse, the demands, the external legal coercion of the law. The ceremonial laws that were there to hold them in and to point to Jesus until He came were completely eliminated. No one could any longer say with any divine authority that another person was to follow a certain required diet (Col. 2:16-17). God did not leave it unclear to Peter. The vision ended just as Gentiles arrived at the door and God said, “Go with them,” for there is neither Jew nor Gentile, for the middle wall of division is broken down in Christ (Eph. 2:11-12). There was a great danger that the Jews would attempt to keep the Gospel to themselves. The living and active Word remains a new wine that cannot be contained, lest it ferment, burst and be lost. God prepared the teacher. What about you?

Verse 34 - Peter, having been taught, now could teach. He got the message “God does not show partiality towards any man” (v.34) That is quite a lesson for any of us to learn. We grow

up with prejudices. Maybe they are not toward Jew or Gentile, but black or white. Maybe they are blue collar vs. white collar, Democrat vs. Republican, Catholic vs. Lutheran, the 52nd St. vs. 10th Ave., or Hooterville vs. Hoe-town.

Verse 35 - Whoever fears God and works righteousness is accepted. To fear God means to give all glory to Him (Rev. 14:7). It means to believe the message of the angels that the Peace of God’s good will toward man does exist through the birth of Jesus Christ to save us from our sins (Luke 2). It means we believe that there is only one possible way to be acceptable with God, through the grace that is in Christ Jesus without any works of the law (Rom. 3-5). It means that we do the will of the Father and believe on Jesus for life everlasting (John 6:40).

“Working righteousness” is a concept to be understood in the light of the Righteousness of God, who by His saving will is creating a people for Himself. He saves His people with His own righteousness (Is. 1:27, 59:9, II Cor. 5:19-21). The righteous person is thus the one in whom God has carried out His saving will. The will of God is indeed so written in their hearts through the cross of Christ’s blood that they follow after righteousness (Is. 51:1, 7) (cf. 11:3, 5).

Verses 38-42 - What we have of Peter’s sermon is short but beautiful. The devil’s oppression (v. 38) is destroyed by God’s impartial way of establishing righteousness for man. We know of what we speak! Peter says, “We ate with this man (Jesus) after He rose from the dead. This forgiveness and righteousness is in line with all of the Old Testament prophecies.”

Verse 44 - It was while the words themselves were still coming out of Peter’s mouth that the Holy Spirit came upon all of those **hearing and receiving** the message.

Verses 45-48 - We have what we call the Gentile’s Christmas, Epiphany. This event can be called the Gentile’s Pentecost. Gentiles were speaking in tongues just as the Apostles had done on Pentecost, Acts 2. It had happened once at Samaria, Acts 8:18. Each time the gospel entered a new field of labor, the book of

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Acts records how God confirmed the Apostolic message with signs and wonders (Heb. 2:3-4). No one there could deny the lesson; these men too had equal part in the gospel of Christ. Today, too, the Holy Spirit does not need our approval to work where He will. Remember the lesson! The Gospel would not be among us if God had not gotten the message across to those like Peter of this world. Our congregations are Gentile in great majority. Every time we gather to hear the Word--every moment of peace which we enjoy through the gospel of forgiveness is a divine encounter arranged for us by God.

Discussion:

Does it matter then, if others deny teachings of the Bible as long as they say that Jesus is LORD? Should we "agree to disagree"? What does it mean to say that Jesus is LORD if we say on the other hand that it does not matter if people follow His Word? No, we will confess that Jesus is LORD by continuing in all of His teachings, uncompromised (John 8:31, Matt. 28:20). Peter and that first century Christian Church, while learning that the gospel is meant for the Gentiles too, remained a confessional church. Peter asked, "Can anyone forbid?" He was concerned that they all be in agreement that this was the LORD's will. They were concerned about offering forgiveness to the impenitent, the blessings of Christ's Church to those who were not members of His Church. They looked for fruits of the Spirit. They bore that fruit of the Spirit: contending for the truth through the midst of doctrinal controversy so that they might agree completely in all things that Jesus taught (Acts 15). Share your confession of Christ; you wouldn't have it if someone had not shared it with you.

Speaking in tongues - the incoherent gabble and the compromising of Jesus' Lordship that is common among today's neo-pentecostal movement is not a fruit of the Spirit. It is not a fruit of the Spirit but a denial of Christ's Lordship to teach and imply that a visible sign is the basis of salvation. It is not a fruit of the Spirit but a denial of Christ's Lordship to teach that denominational differences don't matter. It is not a fruit of the Spirit but a denial of Christ's Lordship to carry on in a disorderly, unedifying,

or rivalrous manner. (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 16:16-17; I Cor. 14) We do not need the external signs of Pentecost: we know that the Apostolic Word is Jesus (Heb. 2:3-4). We need the internal repentance that they see JESUS, ONLY JESUS. (John 15:26, 16:8-14).

Main Application:

I am sent by God to witness unto all. My message? Preaching peace through Jesus Christ. Whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.

Application:

1. I am sent by God to witness unto all. What a message we have to witness to. It is simple, uniform, and based on one historical fact: Christ's death and resurrection. It is a message for anyone we meet. God wants to save them.
2. Discuss how the children's prayers and gifts help bring the gospel to others in many different places. What can they do to help our CLC Missions at home and abroad?
3. Project: On a U.S. map place pins on all the places where we have churches and preaching stations to share God's Word with others. Talk about how many of the missions and preaching stations got started. (See V.B.S. crafts.)
4. Talk to our children about prejudices, how they come about and why they are present (sin, conceit, selfishness, pride). What does Jesus say about how He looks at people? (Cf. v. 34, Rom. 10:10-18) Show from Jesus' life that He was not ashamed to eat and talk with the poor and despised of His day. He "was not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Our love for souls should be colorblind and not status conscious. We have been called to proclaim Jesus to ALL. What should we proclaim to ALL people? The same message Peter preached! "Preaching peace through Jesus Christ... (v. 36) whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly... (v. 39-40) through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins (v. 43)."

Bible passages:
John 1:29,
1 John 2:2,
Rom. 1:16-17

Hymn verses:
371:1, 5; 348:1-
2, 4-5

Lesson 5: Lydia's conversion

Text: Acts 16:9-15

Theme: Lydia prepared by God to live His Word.

Background and setting:

Recall how God called Paul to be a Christian. (Lesson 1) This event occurred about 20 years later. In the meantime, the Lord had trained (Gal. 1:11-18), commissioned (Acts 13:2-3) and sent Paul out (Acts 13:4) as a missionary of the gospel. On his first missionary trip he took the message of Jesus the Savior to Cyprus and Asia Minor (presently Turkey). In this wild and rugged area, the Lord formed congregations at Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia.. (cf. map) After Paul returned to Antioch in Syria, he made a report of this in the conference at Jerusalem (Acts 15), and set out on his second missionary trip (about 49 A.D.), going first to his hometown of Tarsus and then to those new congregations in Asia Minor--strengthening and encouraging the Christians there through the Word of God (Acts 15:41-16:5). Silas, a Jew and one of the leading men of the congregation at Jerusalem, accompanied Paul on this missionary journey (Acts 15:22, 40). At Lystra they were joined by Timothy (Acts 16:1-3), a young disciple to whom Paul had brought the message of Jesus on his first missionary trip. God the Holy Spirit directed Paul's steps on this journey, so that he and his companions came to the sea port town of Troas, not far from the site of ancient Troy. There they were joined by Doctor Luke, the inspired writer of Acts and the Gospel bearing his name (note the "we" in v. 10). At Troas Paul was directed to cross over into Macedonia to give the people there the only help that brings salvation--the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Notes on the text:

Verse 9 - a vision: a sight the Lord caused Paul to see; he may not have been asleep at the time.

Macedonia (map): see Rupprecht Vol. 2,

page 558, whether the man looked (certain type of dress) or sounded (some accent) like a Macedonian, we don't know. What he said made it clear he was from Macedonia.

Come over: Paul is asked to bring this Gospel in person.

Help us: Notice the man doesn't ask just for himself.

Verse 10 - As soon as.. we looked for a way--Paul and his companions did not hesitate or wait for a second invitation. Mission work is urgent work, (cf. Lesson 2 notes). Immediately the next morning they went to the docks to find passage on a ship to Macedonia. We need to be ready to respond to the opportunities God gives us to bring the saving Gospel to others.

Verse 11 - Sailing from Troas (map) - literally "sailing before the wind," God gave his messengers a fair southern wind, so that their trip would be quick and direct.

Samothrace (map) - an island in the Aegean, where the ship, under the shelter of its high shore, anchored for the night.

Neapolis (map) - seaport city, a 7-8 hour sail from Samothrace. Paul did not stop here, because Neapolis was not in Macedonia, but Troas. The Apostle was obedient to his call, down to the details. A paved, military road led up and over a ridge to the town of Philippi, 10 miles away.

Verse 12 - Philippi (map) see Rupprecht, Vol. 2, page 558.

Much is sometimes made of this being the entrance of the Apostle and the Gospel into Europe. However, there is no sign Paul or his companions took any note of their crossing to "another continent." We, because of our origins (most of us Northern European ancestry) can't help but be conscious of God's actions which centuries ago prepared the way for the Gospel to come to us.

a leading city - literally the first one in

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that part of Macedonia.

a colony of Rome - a city with the special privileges of the citizens of Rome itself; namely, with the rights of Roman citizenship: voting, having their own elected government, Roman law, Roman language. It was a "little Rome" in a far-off Macedonia. (cf. Phil. 3:20 Beck or NIV)

We stayed...for some days - Paul carefully looked over and prayed over this mission field before he began his work. In doing so he found that the Jewish community in Philippi (a military, not a commercial city) was small. There was no synagogue, but the Apostle was either told or surmised that the few who practiced the Jewish faith met for worship by the river Gangites.

Verse 13 - On Saturday - the first Sabbath since their arrival in the city.

a place for prayer - no building, but an open parklike area which the Jews living in or visiting Philippi were accustomed to use for worship.

we sat down - the customary position of teachers (cf. Matt. 5:1)

started to talk - not idle conversation.

Paul and his companions used the opportunity to speak of the promised Savior who had come and fulfilled His saving mission.

the women gathered there - No men and just a few women and these not all of Jewish birth, not all residents. Perhaps Philippi had copied the mother city (Rome) in expelling Jews (Acts 18:2). But Paul and the others did not hesitate. They know Jesus' promise to be present wherever two or three are gathered in His name (cf. Matt. 18:20 and v. 14).

Verse 14 - Lydia - a Gentile woman, probably a widow or unmarried, was a dealer in purple cloth; this business Lydia managed successfully and well, selling goods shipped from her home. (She had household servants and probably other employees and a house large enough to provide lodging for Paul and his three co-workers.)

the town of Thyatira - a city of Asia Minor,

famous for its purple dyes (obtained from shell fish taken from area streams) and guilds of dyers. Lydia may have helped establish a Christian church here (Rev. 2:18).

She worshiped God - A proselyte, Lydia had been led by God to abandon the worship of the idols of her day, probably the sun god Tyrimnas (common in Thyatira; source of the city-name Tyre). Now she was led to worship the Creator of the sun, moon and stars--who had promised to send "The Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings." (Mal. 4:2)

As she listened - Lydia had earlier been led by God to regularly set aside her business concerns in order to worship. Now in the course of her regular worship habits, the Lord led her to find the pearl of great price--as the Gospel of Jesus Christ was set forth by the Apostle Paul and his co-workers.

the Lord opened her heart - through the Gospel message God in His grace opened the heart of Lydia to receive her Savior. Rom. 10:17, I Cor. 12:3, Matt. 16:17. What began with interest concluded with the creation of faith in Jesus. We can assume that Lydia made verbal confession of her faith (cf. Rom. 10:10, Acts 8:36, 37), for we next hear how...

Verse 15 - she and her family were baptized - Perhaps in the waters of the river on whose banks she first heard about her Savior. "Family" is literally "household" and may have included children, slaves and employees.

she urged us..."come and stay at my home" - Lydia quickly demonstrated the sincerity of her faith by opening her home to her teachers. Perhaps they first declined; at any rate, she was insistent ("she made us come"). Here is Christian love, gratitude and generosity--the fruits of faith worked by the Gospel. An example of the Christian hospitality so often urged (Heb. 13:2, I Tim. 5:10, I Pet. 4:9) and so lovingly practiced in the Apostolic Church... Lydia's living of the Word she had received (those whom God used to make her

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a member of His household, she made honored members of her household) set the tone for the congregation that the Lord gathered at Philippi. This was the one congregation which later remembered the needs of the imprisoned Apostle and sent him kindly personal gifts. (Phil. 4:15) All believers are not grateful, but they all should be.

Discussion:

Lydia - prepared by God to live His Word. God's preparation of Lydia includes all that the Lord did to bring the Gospel to her: Paul's conversion, Paul's call and commissioning, the Spirit's directing of Paul and his companions to Troas, the vision of the man from Macedonia, even the good sailing weather Paul experienced in coming from Troas to Neapolis.

God's preparation of Lydia personally included His bringing her to know the God of the Bible and to worship Him regularly as a proselyte--even when she was not in her hometown, and when there were few who worshiped with her. Finally and most importantly, the Lord converted Lydia through the Gospel.

God led Lydia to live His Word by causing her to express her thankfulness to the Lord Jesus in the way she generously shared her home with the men who had brought the Good News to her. She didn't wait until later, but took hold of the opportunity right then and there. When the Lord opened Lydia's heart, He opened it to Himself and to all who came in His name.

Application:

We are missionaries of Christ when in kindness and love we generously share with others what God has given us. Paul shared the Good News about Jesus. Lydia shared her house and home. Paul and his companions showed others what Jesus had done to forgive their sins and give them eternal life. Lydia showed what Jesus had done in her heart by what she did.

What opportunities do you have to tell others about Jesus?

What opportunities do you have to show others what Jesus is like? (Be sure the children discuss the "here and now" - reminding them how Lydia didn't wait until "someday" to live the Gospel word she had received.)

When we are kind, loving and generous with others--as Jesus' love leads us to be--how does that help to open up opportunities to tell others of Christ? (When Christian children behave politely or are "good sports" in their play, people want to know why they behave this way. This gives opportunity to tell others about the Savior.)

Main Application:

Encourage our fellow Christians in telling others about Jesus. Pray that God helps you live His Word as missionaries of Christ.

We are missionaries of Christ, when, like Lydia, we support and encourage our fellow Christians in telling others about Jesus. Lydia's hospitality surely helped Paul's efforts in Philippi.

What can you do to support and encourage others in telling the Good News? (Your pastor? Your Christian (Sunday School or Day School) teacher(s)? Your parents? Your brothers, sisters, friends?)

Emphasize personal actions BEFORE discussing the less personal "offering envelope" support.

Be prepared to discuss mission efforts of your own congregation and of the CLC! Encourage the children to pray for the mission congregations and pastors throughout the CLC!

Pray (before, during and after class--silently and with your students) that God help you and your students to actively take hold of the opportunities He gives you to live His word as missionaries of Christ.

Bible passages:
Phil. 1:3-6;
4:14-19

Hymn verses:
496

