

Acts #17
Bringing People to God
Acts 8:1-4

In our last study of Acts we looked at Stephen's address to the leaders of Israel as he cut them to the heart in conviction, "When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth." The Greek reads like this, "As they continued to listen to this address, they were becoming infuriated and began to grind their teeth at him."

This records the third murder for the nation of Israel as it relates to their relationship to the Kingdom. In allowing John the Baptist to be slain they *rejected the Father* who had sent him to prepare the way for Christ. When they crucified Christ they *rejected the Son*. **In slaying Stephen they opened the way for the Gospel to go to the Gentiles.** This pattern is consistent with the Word of God that says in Romans 1:16, Romans 2:9, Romans 2:10 that the Gospel was "to the Jew first and also to the Gentiles." Therefore, we have this conclusion in Romans 11:25 that "blindness in part...to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in."

This week we are going to look at some of the events that brought people to the Lord.

In Acts chapters 7 and 8 we are able to see two of the greatest men that God has ever sent to show the world the message of Jesus Christ.

A. The first of these is Stephen who carried God's message to the nation of Israel. If there was ever a man, in my opinion, who lived the Christ-life that he preached, it was this man Stephen. You will remember that Stephen was not a "preacher" in the sense that we call "preachers" today, but was in reality a "deacon." To me this is a challenge to our own present-day deacons in every church to put Christ first in all things, as we seek to minister in His name.

B. The next is Saul of Tarsus, whom we know as the Paul the apostle, who carried God's message to the Gentiles. Paul was as dedicated to his religion as any man in all of history. In fact, he was so concerned about this "New Way," that we are told, "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house and, dragging men and women, committed them to prison."

But Saul was never the same after the death of this young deacon by the name of Stephen. In fact, Paul himself still reflected with vivid memory that death of Stephen, as seen in Acts 22:20, "And when the blood of thy martyr, Stephen, was shed, I also was standing by, and consented unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him." I can imagine that every night when he lay

down to sleep there must have been something in the back of his mind that reminded Saul of the look on the face of that dying young man of God. Or he might wake up in the night to the voice and prayer of Stephen as he prayed, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”

I believe that it took the death of God’s man to bring Saul of Tarsus to know the reality of God!

The Scriptures also tell us that it took the prayers of an uncle to bring Lot to God. The story is given for us in Genesis 18:23-33, “And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are in it? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: Suppose there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. And he spoke unto him yet again, and said, Suppose there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty's sake. And he said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Suppose there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Suppose ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake. And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had ceased talking with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.” And then in verses 15 and 16 of the next chapter we are told, “And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold of his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters, the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him outside of the city.”

It took a burning city and the loss of his property to bring Lot to God, but Abraham’s prayers had been answered.

We are also told that it took blindness and imprisonment to bring Samson back to God. This “spiritual playboy” had gambled with his soul, his nation’s welfare, and God’s mission for his life. This “one-man-army” really wanted to serve God, but it seemed that he was always allowing women to get him

side-tracked, and then he would serve God only when there was a “must” situation at hand.

A. Samson’s first fall was his defiance and disobedience. Judges 14:1-3 tells us, “And Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah, of the daughters of the Philistines. And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnah, of the daughters of the Philistines; now, therefore, get her for me as my wife. Then his father and his mother said unto him, Is there no woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleases me well.”

I believe the first step toward rebellion toward God is rebellion against the authority of parents. I am convinced that no child will honor the laws of God, unless he will honor the laws of Mamma and the land!

B. Samson’s next fall was distrust. Judges 14:14-12 reveals his problem of distrust, “And Samson said unto them, I will now put forth a riddle unto you: if ye can certainly declare it to me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing: But if ye cannot declare it me, then shall ye give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it. And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth food, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. And they could not in three days expound the riddle.” Samson’s wife knew the answer, therefore, we are told in verse 15, “And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they said unto Samson’s wife, Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father’s house with fire...” And when the Philistines were able to tell Samson the answer to the riddle, his awful distrust raised its awful head, “And he said unto them, If you had not plowed with my heifer, you had not found out my riddle.” And the next few verses tell us that because of his anger and distrust that Samson gave his wife away to one of his friends!

Distrust is one of the worst things that can happen to a family. A husband and wife must be able to trust one another if their marriage is going to work. But this trust must be based on a love that shine in such a way that they can feel a mutual love and trust for each other. Samson lost that mutual trust.

D. Samson’s next fall came because of his yielding to the pull of his flesh. Judges 16:1 says, “Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her.”

There are multitudes of Christians today who have found themselves in the “junk-yard” of humanity because they were not willing to say “no” to the

lusts of their flesh. Husband, wives, and young people alike, are constantly faced with the choices that pit the “pull of the flesh” against the “righteousness of God” in our lives. And the choices that we make will determine whether or not our testimony will be that of “victory” or of “failure.” Unfortunately, like so many Christians of today, made the wrong choice!

Now Samson is blind and in prison, and is being laughed at by the very people that he had sought to share the message of God, the Philistines. In his pain and humility Samson cries out to God, “O Lord God, remember me, I pray Thee, and strengthen me, I pray Thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes...And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might: and the house fell.”

Here is a man that is alone and dejected, realizing that he has failed his family, his nation, himself, and most of all, his God. And out of his desperation he cries out to God. And, just as it is today, God’s grace is always ready to be poured out on the willing soul!

There are many other examples that I could point out in the Word of God that shows us how God, although He does not cause the circumstances, uses various situations as tools to bring people to Himself. I am reminded of the words of Jesus in John 6:44 that says, “No man can come to me, except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him...” Why does God use every circumstance to draw us back to Himself? The answer is simple, as seen in 2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

If you are under the sound of my voice and have never been saved, God is reaching out to you. If you are already saved and have fallen away from God in your commitment and service, God is reaching out to you. Whatever the case, you can rest assured that God is dealing with your heart tonight.