

“THAT OLD TIME RELIGION”

“All Have Need Of God’s Salvation”

Scripture Reading – Acts, 5:12-32

The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade. No-one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.

Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. “Go, stand in the temple courts”, he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life”. At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin – the full assembly of the elders of Israel – and sent to the jail for the apostles. But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no-one inside”. On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this.

Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people”. At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them. Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name”, he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood”.

Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him”.

‘They overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.’

Revelation, 12:11, NIV

This series, based on THE BOOK OF ACTS, is entitled ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’.

The reason I want to call this series ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’ is that we need to look back in order that we might really look to the future. The old time religion needs to become the new time religion because it is the all time religion. If we get back to the basics of life in the Christian Church, we might better understand what the Holy Spirit can do in our hearts and lives today.

THE BOOK OF ACTS is the story of success; the story of a church triumphant.

It is the story of a small group of uncultured and generally unlearned people with meagre resources – very little money, no prestige, and no church buildings. This small group of people went out to tell the story of a publicly executed Jew. They went out against great obstacles – the imperial might of the Romans, the intellectual sophistication of the Greeks, and the religious bigotry of the Jews. They turned the world inside out and upside down for Jesus Christ.

The Acts of the Apostles is the story of a church on fire with evangelism and growth...

“ALL HAVE NEED OF GOD’S SALVATION”

Satan wants to divide, disgrace, and decrease the church.

The Early Christian Church had to withstand the fiercest attacks of the devil. The result? The Holy Spirit filled Church was unified, magnified, and multiplied. Not only did it stand firm it grew! Satan had failed to stop the testimony of the apostles with threats from the religious authorities of the day. When that did not work, he changed tactics and sought to infiltrate the church from within. When the Holy Spirit revealed the truth to Peter about the wicked sin of Ananias and Sapphira, the devil’s plan was thwarted.

Satan moved from Plan A to Plan B and when that did not work, he tried Plan A again.

The apostles were arrested and thrown into prison. They did not resist arrest or organise a public protest. They quietly went along with the temple guard and actually spent a few hours in the public jail. But during the night, an angel set them free and told them to return to their witnessing in the temple.

Satan was trying to stop the miracles, but his actions only multiplied the miracles.

Neither the guards nor the leaders knew the prisoners had been liberated. Imagine the surprised looks on the faces of the guards when they discovered that their most important prisoners were gone. Imagine the astonishment of the members of the Sanhedrin when they heard the report.

What a contrast between the apostles and the members of the council.

The council was educated, officially ordained, and approved by man, yet they had no ministry of power. The apostles were ordinary laymen, yet God’s power was at work in their lives. The council tried desperately to protect themselves and their dead traditions, while the apostles

risked their lives to share the living Word of God. The dynamic church was enjoying the new; whilst the dead council was defending the old.

Why would the church not be silent?

‘Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him”.’

Acts, 5:29-32, NIV

‘Evangelism is basically a matter of truth. Is it true that there is but one God and he a God of perfect holiness and perfect love? Is it true that he has come to our world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth to show us what he is like, and to reconcile us from our alienation into his family? Is it true that the living God can come and indwell a man’s life, and transform him utterly? If it is, then it is not only permissible for a Christian to spread such good news, it is incumbent upon him.’

Michael Green

In Acts, chapters 8-10, we read of the conversion of three notable persons...

‘Phillip started out, and on his way he met AN ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship.’

Acts, 8:27, NIV

‘SAUL was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples.’

Acts, 9:1, NIV

‘At Caesarea there was a man named CORNELIUS, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment.’

Acts, 10:1, NIV

These men were from different backgrounds, but they had at least four things in common...

1. THEY HAD THE SAME HEARTACHES

We sometimes receive requests for help as people draw their family tree.

Requests come in from around the country and as far away as Canada and New Zealand! People want to know if any record exists of their ancestors, of whom they seem so proud. But if we traced our family tree back as far as THE BOOK OF GENESIS, our ancestors were nothing to write home about. It seems that we are descended from a crooked farmer (ADAM) and a drunken sailor (NOAH).

Noah had three sons who settled in different geographical areas of the world.



HAM settled in Africa, so the Ethiopian was a descendent of Ham.

SHEM settled in the Middle East so Saul, as a Jew, was a descendent of Shem.

JAPHETH settled in Europe, so Cornelius, an Italian was a descendent of Japheth.

In three chapters in Acts, we have a microcosm of the world.

They were descendents of Ham, Shem and Japheth, but their real heartache was caused by being a descendent of one man... ADAM. Our problem is that we are all descendents of Adam. Sin entered into the world through Adam and in Adam all die.

‘Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.’

Romans, 5:12, NIV

How can we be declared guilty for something Adam did thousands of years ago?

Many feel it is not fair for God to judge us because of Adam’s sin. Yet each of us confirms our heritage with Adam by our own sins every day. We have the same sinful nature and are prone to rebel against God, and we are judged for the sins we ourselves commit. Because we are sinners, we sin. Because we are sinners, it is not fairness or justice we need... it is mercy!

If you meet any man or woman, boy or girl, they all share the same problem.

The place of your birth makes no difference. The family you were born into makes no difference. The colour of your skin makes no difference. The environment you live in makes no difference. The education you received makes no difference. If you are living on planet earth, you face the same problem that every other person living on this planet faces... SIN!

The problem in the world is nothing more, nothing less, than sin.

All men have one problem, and that problem is sin. We are all sons of Adam. Nowadays, the gospel message has become more of a social message. Nonetheless, man does not need a boost from beneath; he needs a birth from above.

2. THEY HAD THE SAME HUNGER

‘Phillip started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship.’

Acts, 8:27, NIV

THE ETHIOPIAN was an important official in the treasury of a powerful government.

He had authority, he had prestige, and he had power. He was in economics, he was in government. He had his fingertips on the economic pulse of a kingdom, but he travelled to Jerusalem in order to worship. A journey undertaken not by private jet and official car but by chariot. It would have been an uncomfortable and unpleasant ride.

This man had an emptiness in his heart.

An emptiness that his authority, position, power, prestige, and wealth could not fill. He travelled to Jerusalem to worship and the wells of religion were dry to him. He was returning home,

reading from the prophet Isaiah, trying to have the longing in his heart fulfilled. He had a hunger and a thirst that only Jesus Christ could fill.

‘Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.’

Acts, 9:1-2, NIV

SAUL was not from the world of politics, he was in the world of philosophy.

He was an outstanding scholar. Today he would probably have obtained more than one PhD. He was a man of breeding, he was a man of culture, he was fluent in languages. He was self-confident. He was a religious fanatic on a mission to seek out Christians, followers of THE WAY, in order to persecute them. He sought to protect the religious doctrine and dogma of the day from this heretical cult that was spreading out at an alarming rate from Jerusalem.

The Holy Spirit of God was prodding Saul’s heart.

Outside Saul looked self-assured, but inside he was like a raging volcano waiting to explode. After overseeing the stoning of Stephen, the picture of the courageous man whose face looked like an angel remained with Saul and the Holy Spirit kept on, kept on, kept on, kept on prodding his spirit, soul, and body. The Holy Spirit had created deep within Saul’s heart a desire and hunger for God that his philosophy and religion could not meet.

‘At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.’

Acts, 10:1-2, NIV

CORNELIUS was a successful soldier.

The Roman army had conquered and subjugated an entire world under its rule. The Romans knew how to conquer and crush her enemies. They were victorious in battle and Cornelius was a centurion with medals on his chest. He was a man’s man. A man not in the world of finance or philosophy but in the world of fighting.

He was a devout man who prayed and gave.

Cornelius was not a saved man; he was not born again. Perhaps his quest for God began one night on sentry duty as he looked up into the heavens and marvelled at creation. Perhaps he whispered a prayer to the Creator and sought to know him. The prayers he offered and the money that he gave to the poor and those in need did not satisfy his hunger. Deep within his heart was a hunger to know God that all his good deeds had not met.

All three men were on a quest for God.

Monetary power did not satisfy the Ethiopian. Mental power did not satisfy Saul. Military power did not satisfy Cornelius. Wherever you travel and whoever you meet, all people have the same heartache – it is sin, and all people have the same hunger – it’s a quest to know God.

3. THEY NEED THE SAME HELP

God did not just ‘zap’ the Ethiopian, Saul, and Cornelius.

They all had the same heartache and hunger, but they also needed the same help. God used human instruments to help point them to Jesus Christ.

‘The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it”. Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. “How can I”, he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.’

Acts, 8:29-31, NIV

What did God tell Phillip to do? God told Philip, “Go!”

The Bible tells us that Phillip was a deacon in the Church. In THE SALVATION ARMY, we do not have deacons, but we do have Local Officers, which is what Phillip would have been today! God told Phillip to “GO” and he tells our local officers, those who hold commissions to “GO”.

If you are a local officer and you do not possess a soul-winner’s heart, then you should resign.

‘In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” “Yes, Lord”, he answered. The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight”.’

Acts, 9:10-12, NIV

What did God tell Ananias to do? God told Ananias, “Go!”

The Bible does not tell us much more about Ananias, but it seems that he was a layman. We don’t usually speak of clergy and laity, but that is what most of you are. God told Ananias to “GO” and he tells us to “GO” as well.

If you are just a Soldier or an Adherent and you do not possess a soul-winner’s heart, you need a good dose of revival or salvation.

‘While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them”. Peter went down and said to the men, “I’m the one you’re looking for. Why have you come?” The men replied, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say”.’

Acts, 10:19-22, NIV

What did God tell Peter to do? God told Peter to, “Go!”

The Bible tells us that Peter was a preacher. So I guess this is where I come in to the equation. God told Peter to “GO” and he tells me to “GO” as well.

If I am an officer and do not possess a soul-winner’s heart, then I should resign as well.

The point is that no one is excluded from the task of soul-winning.

A Christian who refuses to testify Jesus is like a bus driver who refuses to drive a bus or a barber who refuses to cut hair. A Christian who refuses to "GO" is not just missing out on a blessing; he is guilty of high treason against heaven's King. You might ask where you are to go and the simple answer is wherever God will tell you. When the Spirit says "GO" then you "GO".

There are three abilities that you need to help someone to Jesus...

AVAILABILITY

Phillip was enjoying a revival meeting in Samaria when he heard the call to go to the Gaza Strip. We read that he ran all the way from Samaria to Gaza. Running a long distance may be out of the question for some of us, but the big question is: Are we available?

If God calls us to go and do, how would we reply? We live in a busy world that places demands upon our time and resources. Phillip was called to leave behind a revival where the masses were being saved in order to minister to one man. Would you do that?

EXPENDABILITY

Ananias knew what Saul had been up to and that Saul had a well-earned reputation for persecuting Christians when God told Ananias to go and minister to Saul. Ananias was to go immediately and alone. No matter what dangers may lie ahead and no matter what the cost, the big question is are you expendable?

'They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death'.

Revelation, 12:11, NIV

ADAPTABILITY

Peter was a strict Jew and was not sure if he should go and speak to Gentiles. God spoke to him in a dream that helped Peter get rid of some of his bias, his prejudice. Whilst he maintained his stubbornness he was useless to God's purpose. Only when he learned to adapt and change was he able to be used in this way.

Times are changing, so people say. Whilst we should never change the message of the Gospel, we should be open to changing our methods!

4. THEY HAD THE SAME HOPE

All three men shared the same hope – Jesus. It is true of all men today!

THE HOPE OF AFRICA IS JESUS

'The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.'

Acts, 8:34-35, NIV

THE HOPE OF ASIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST IS JESUS

'As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting", he replied.'

Acts, 9:3-5, NIV

THE HOPE OF EUROPE AND THE WESTERN WORLD IS JESUS

'Then Peter began to speak: "I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name".'

Acts, 10:34-43, NIV

'A hundred thousand souls a day are passing one by one away, in Christless guilt and gloom without one ray of hope or light with future dark as endless night, their passing to their doom. Who is the answer? The world needs Jesus Christ. There is no other need like the need for Jesus.'

Albert Benjamin Simpson

'Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not whether they be clergymen or laymen, they alone will shake the gates of Hell and set up the Kingdom of Heaven here upon the Earth.'

John Wesley

*Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save.*