

## **“THAT OLD TIME RELIGION”**

# ***“Learning To Share Your Faith”***

## **Scripture Reading – Acts, 10:34-48**

*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”.*

*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.*

*Then Peter said, “Can anyone keep these people from being baptised with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have”. So he ordered that they be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.*

***‘In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.’***

***I Peter, 3:15, 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 through us today.

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The New Testament\Acts\That Old Time Religion\17 Learning To Share Your Faith

**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 three 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...*

## **“LEARNING TO SHARE YOUR FAITH”**

### **Do you share your faith?**

Some Christians seem so proud when they declare that they ‘KEEP THE FAITH’. But whilst we know what they mean, faith is something not just to be kept – it must be given away, it must be shared. If a Christian has no desire to share their faith, then whatever faith they do hold on to should be given up. After all, if we had the cure for cancer, we would be quick to share it. We have Jesus – are we as quick to share his Good News?

### **We skip on in THE BOOK OF ACTS to ‘PETER AT CORNELIUS’ HOUSE’.**

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.

### **Cornelius was a devout man who prayed and gave.**

However, 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. But the prayers he offered, and the money that he gave to the poor and needy, did not satisfy his spiritual hunger. Deep within his heart was a hunger to know God that Cornelius’s good deeds had not met.

### **God sovereignly arranged to bring Peter into Cornelius’s home.**

Peter had experienced a vision which changed his heart and mind and opened him up to the new possibilities that God was now leading him into. Here Peter was at the home of a pagan, a gentile, a roman soldier who wanted to know about Christ and Christianity. Cornelius had prepared food and his family and friends were interested in what Peter had to say.

*The encounter between Peter and Cornelius gives us an example to help us share our faith...*

## **1. THE PERSONAL WITNESS OF THE SAINTS**

***‘Peter said, “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem”.’***

***Acts, 10:39-42, NIV***

**‘WE ARE WITNESSES OF EVERYTHING HE DID IN THE COUNTRY OF THE JEWS AND IN JERUSALEM’**

The disciples had been with Jesus for about three years. They were his constant companions. They lived with him. They walked with him. They talked with him. They prayed with him. They worshipped with him. They saw everything that Jesus did – and so were witnesses to the truth.

**Consider the character of some of the witnesses Jesus chose to follow him...**

JOHN was a young man... a visionary... a philosopher.

SIMON PETER was a big hard working fisherman... he probably smelled of fish... he had pretty salty language before he got saved because he slipped into it on occasion afterwards... he knew how to curse and to swear.

SIMON THE ZEALOT was a political activist... he was a true right winger... he was a Zionist.

MATTHEW was a tax collector... he had sold out to the Roman Government and was a turncoat who helped the occupiers of his country to exploit the poor Jewish people... he was a man who amassed a great fortune at the expense of his fellow brothers.

NATHANIEL was a cynic... remember he was the man who asked about Jesus: **“CAN ANY GOOD THING COME OUT OF NAZARETH?”**.

THOMAS was a doubter... he said, **“I WILL NOT BELIEVE UNLESS I SEE THE PRINT OF THE NAILS IN HIS HANDS AND THE WOUND IN HIS SIDE”**... but when he saw, he was convinced.

PHILIP was one who had the facts and figures at his fingertips... he had a calculator mind that counted the 5,000 on the mountainside and wondered how on earth they could be fed... He was also a little slow... when some Greeks came to speak with Jesus, he had no idea what to do... but at least he figured out that he could always ask for help.

JAMES was a no nonsense kind of person... he was like a hard nosed business man... if you want to know what he was like, it is best to read the letter he wrote.

ANDREW was a nice guy... he just delighted in bringing people to Jesus – his brother Simon, the little child who had brought fish sandwiches for lunch, and the Greeks that first spoke to Philip.

The point is Jesus could not have picked a wider mixture of people to witness for him. Can you imagine these people ever agreeing on anything? But they agreed about Jesus...

### **THEY WITNESSED HIS VIRTUOUS LIFE**

***“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”.***

**Acts, 10:37-38, NIV**

**‘JESUS WENT AROUND DOING GOOD AND HEALING ALL’**

You can imagine Peter’s response to those who questioned him. Peter knew that Jesus had turned water into wine because he himself drank some of it. Peter knew that Jesus walked on water because he himself was out of the boat and on the lake with him at the

time. Peter knew that Jesus raised a little girl from the dead because he was there; he saw it for himself. Peter knew that Jesus was transfigured because he was there; he saw it for himself and he heard Jesus speaking with Moses and Elijah and he himself heard God’s voice speak directly to him.

***Peter knew what he had witnessed... He was prepared not only to defend it; he would die to protect the knowledge of the truth he had gained.***

### **THEY WITNESSED HIS VICARIOUS DEATH**

***“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.”***

**Acts, 10:39, NIV**

Incidentally, the word ‘VICARIOUS’ means ‘SHOCKING, SCANDALOUS, EXPLICIT’.

**‘THEY KILLED HIM BY HANGING HIM ON A TREE’**

Peter was there when Jesus was nailed to the cross. He saw the Romans drive the nails into his quivering hands and feet. He heard the cry of anguish as Jesus questioned, **“MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”**. Peter was there when Jesus prayed, **“FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO”**. Peter was there when Jesus cried, **“FATHER, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMEND MY SPIRIT”**. He was there when Jesus died. He helped those who took Jesus down from the cross and laid him in the tomb.

***Peter knew what he had witnessed... He was prepared not only to defend it; he would die to protect the knowledge of the truth he had gained.***

### **THEY WITNESSED HIS VICTORIOUS RESURRECTION**

***“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.”***

**Acts, 10:40-41, NIV**

**‘GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD ON THE THIRD DAY AND CAUSED HIM TO BE SEEN’**

Peter was convinced of the resurrection of Jesus not because of the empty tomb. People today state that the empty tomb proves nothing, because the disciples could have stolen his body. Peter testified to seeing, eating and drinking with Jesus after He rose from the dead. People today state that Jesus did not die on the cross – Peter refuted their argument entirely. Of course, he was there and witnessed it, whilst the critics were not!

***Peter knew what he had witnessed... He was prepared not only to defend it; he would die to protect the knowledge of the truth he had gained.***

**Nothing can refute the testimony of a truthful witness.**

We should never underestimate the influence and power that a witness can have. Of course, ‘A CHRISTIAN WITH A VIBRANT TESTIMONY IS NEVER AT THE MERCY OF A SCEPTIC WITH AN ARGUMENT’.

*‘That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.’*

**1 John, 1:1-4, NIV**

## 2. THE PROPHETIC WITNESS OF THE SCRIPTURES

*‘Peter said, “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, 10:42-43, NIV**

**We noted last time in ‘A NEW CREATION’ that Saul was a stunningly brilliant man.**

Saul had an unparalleled upbringing and education. He learned at the feet of Gamaliel. Saul was able to speak many languages and had the equivalent of a double PhD. Saul had spent many years saturating his mind studying the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and although these same Scriptures pointed to Jesus, Saul did not and could not see it – until the scales fell from his eyes. Then Saul went into the synagogue and preached Christ. Now he could see and give forceful argument and proof that Jesus is the Christ.

**When Saul went into Arabia, he put the Old Testament into his knapsack.**

When he came out of the desert, he had ROMANS, EPHESIANS, PHILIPPIANS, and COLOSSIANS in his heart. He looked at the Old Testament and all that he could see was Jesus. He looked at the Tabernacle and all that he could see was Jesus. He looked at the Levitical Offerings and all that he could see was Jesus. He looked at the Temple and all that he could see was Jesus. He looked at the Psalms and that he could see was Jesus. He looked at the Prophets and all that he could see was Jesus. The whole Bible was full of Jesus – but Saul had never seen it for himself before. When the Lord took the scales away from his eyes, all he could see was Jesus.

**Peter is saying a similar thing here: ‘ALL THE PROPHETS POINT TO JESUS AS SAVIOUR’.**

We have the benefit of Paul and Peter’s written works in the New Testament which gives us some insight into ‘THE PROPHETIC WITNESS OF THE SCRIPTURES’. Remember that when Paul and Peter spoke about Scripture they were speaking solely of THE OLD TESTAMENT. There was, at this time, no New Testament.

*Can you, like them, look at the Scriptures and see in its pages Jesus and not only that, but the truth that Jesus saves?*

**‘ALL THE PROPHETS TESTIFY ABOUT HIM THAT EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM RECEIVES FORGIVENESS OF SINS THROUGH HIS NAME’**

**Consider how the Scriptures point to Jesus – and Jesus as Saviour...**

In THE GARDEN OF EDEN, when God killed the innocent animals to provide coverings of skin for the disobedient Adam and Eve, it pictures the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and the covering of his atonement.

When CAIN AND ABEL had an argument over the first harvest festival altar service and Abel killed an innocent lamb for the atonement of his sins, Abel’s lamb spoke of the Lord Jesus Christ – the Lamb of God, who was slain before the foundation of the world.

When GOD TOLD ABRAM that He would bless all of the world through his seed (not seeds), the seed of Abraham was the Lord Jesus Christ.

When ISAAC WAS OFFERED BY ABRAHAM as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah, it was a dress rehearsal for Calvary. It was a picture of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ that would take place over a thousand years later in Jerusalem, on Mount Moriah.

When THE ISRAELITES KILLED THE LAMBS FOR THE PASSOVER, before the Exodus from slavery in Egypt, it pictures the Lord Jesus Christ – who is our Passover Lamb.

THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS is not solely a history book of Israel, nor a handbook of Jewish religion and system of sacrifices, it is a picture of the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is also our own High Priest.

PSALMS 2 speaks of the very Son of God – and how the kings and rulers of this world want nothing to do with him.

PSALMS 22 (which we studied in the series ‘THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST’) reads like an account of the crucifixion from an eye witness standing at the very foot of the cross. It was written centuries before the Lord Jesus Christ himself was born.

When ISAIAH wrote of the pain, suffering and glory of the servant (CHAPTER 53) he spoke about Jesus. The prophet MICAH told us the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

ZECHARIAH pictures the second coming of the crucified Messiah to his brothers in Israel who gave him his wounds at the house of his friends.

MALACHI, the last book in the Old Testament, prophesies that John the Baptist – ‘MY MESSENGER’ – will prepare the way for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible was written over 1,500 years, by forty different authors, and in three different languages. Nonetheless, every page points to Jesus – and every page shows us that salvation comes to us only through believing his name.

*‘Jesus said, “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life”.’*

**John, 5:39-40, NIV**

**Do not become so involved in religion that you miss Christ.**

The religious leaders knew what the Bible said but failed to apply its words to their lives. They knew the teachings of the Scriptures but failed to see the Messiah to whom the Scriptures point. They knew the rules but missed the Saviour. Entrenched in their own religious system, they refused to let the Son of God change their lives.

### 3. THE POWERFUL WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

*‘While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.’*

**Acts, 10:44-46a, NIV**

**Peter was still preaching when the people believed and the Holy Spirit interrupted them.**

God the Father interrupted Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration, and God the Son interrupted him in the matter of the temple tax. Now, God the Spirit interrupted him – and Peter never was able to finish his sermon... Would that preachers today had interruptions of this kind!

**The Holy Spirit gave witness to the Jews that these Gentiles were truly born again.**

After all, these men had not seen the vision with Peter and had not come to understand that the Gentiles were now on an equal footing with the Jews. This does not suggest that every new believer gives evidence of salvation by speaking in tongues, though every true believer will certainly use his or her tongue to glorify God. This was an event parallel to Pentecost: the same Holy Spirit who had come on the Jewish believers had now come on these Gentile believers. No wonder the Jewish believers with Peter were astonished!

**Whilst Acts, 2 describes the Jewish Pentecost, Acts, 10 is the Gentile Pentecost.**

Just as the Holy Spirit was poured out on Jewish believers in Jerusalem and they began to speak in other tongues, or languages, so the same Holy Spirit was poured out on these Gentile believers in Caesarea and they also began to speak in other tongues, or languages.

**The important thing was not that they spoke in other tongues.**

These tongues were the outward evidence of the internal work of God in the hearts of these people. The amazing, wonderful thing was that God was giving the Holy Spirit to live within the hearts of all men – Jews and Gentiles. The tongues issued here were an inaugural sign – the sign showing that God had worked in the hearts of Cornelius, his family, and his close friends.

**There is also the praise witness of the Holy Spirit.**

These new believers also praised God. One translation uses the phrase ‘THEY MAGNIFIED GOD’. In other words, these new Christians were so full of praise that they uplifted the name of Jesus. They were singing and shouting praises to God – they were extravagant in their worship.

**Do you wish that you had more courage to testify and witness for Jesus?**

I am convinced that most of us want to share our faith with others and we want to tell others about our Saviour, but we just do not know what to say or how to say it. Our loyalty makes us

want to go, but our fear makes us slow. Therefore, we are not the vibrant testimony that we ought always to be. Truth be told, there are far too many people within the Church who have been intimidated to such an extent that they have become cowardly Christians in desperate need of an epidemic of holy courage before they can ever become contagious Christians.


*‘Our churches are full of people who truly believe and want to follow the way of Jesus – but who cannot bring themselves to talk about their faith. “I would not know what to say” is the immediate reaction of many. Again, there are those who are frightened to share their faith and experience because they do not want to embarrass their friends or be ‘a bore’. The truth is that the timely word coming out of a genuine experience of Jesus Christ is never embarrassing and certainly never boring.’*

**Gavin Reid**


#### **“HOW CAN YOU SHARE YOUR FAITH?”**

 **The world is looking for something in your life that cannot be explained.**

*In other words, what is there about your life that defies a natural explanation? In what ways has God worked in your life that can only be pointed to the supernatural? Only when the world sees that you are living supernaturally will it be interested in the faith you want to share. Only when the world is asking about the supernatural work of God in your life, can you effectively accredit this to Jesus Christ.*

 **To share your faith effectively, you must point people to Jesus Christ.**

*The Old Testament foretells his coming whilst the New Testament contains eye witness accounts of his life, death, and resurrection. In addition, it shows us how the first Christians worked out their faith and shared it effectively with the world.*

 **When you give witness to Christ in your life and you point to the witness of the Scriptures then the Holy Spirit will turn up and solidify all your efforts.**

*The Holy Spirit will convince men of the truth and convict men of their sin. He will glorify Jesus in their hearts – and give you reason to praise God for your powerful testimony.*

*‘No life of faith can be lived privately. There must be overflow into the lives of others.’*

**Eugene H Peterson**

**The author of ‘THE MESSAGE’ challenges us to consider two things:**

Firstly, that we are only able to be here today because those who went before us understood that the overflow of their lives would give life to others in the future. Whilst we today have inherited our faith, we will be a spiritual foundation of church for those who come after us.

Secondly, whilst our faith is inherited, it is not a faith to be hoarded and kept under lock and key. Your faith, my faith, and our collective faith, is to be shared and overflow into the lives around us in Malton, Norton on Derwent & Ryedale.

**“TELL OUT THE WONDERFUL STORY, TELL IT WHERE’ER YOU GO!”**