



## DEVOTIONAL FOR ACTS 20-26

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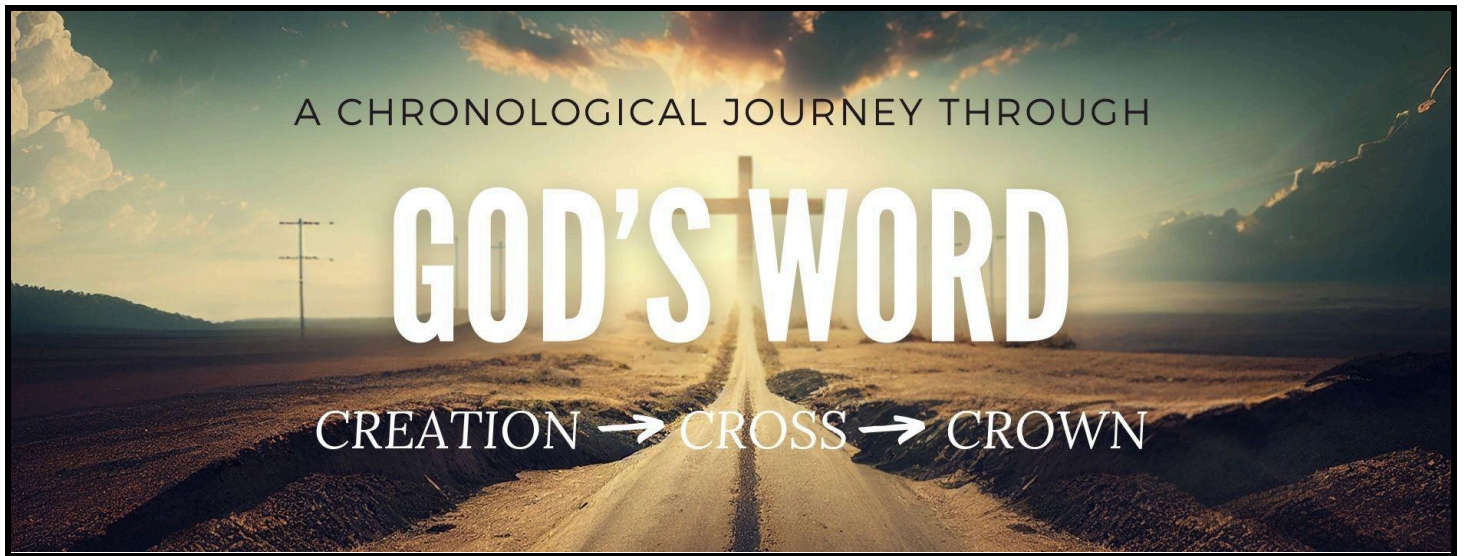
Have you ever thought about why God saved you? Or questioned your purpose in life? I used to think that Jesus died to save me from sin, so that I could be given eternal life through Him and be reunited with my Creator. But then, if God only wanted to have a relationship with me, wouldn't He have just taken me up to heaven the instant I accepted Christ? Why leave me to experience the toils and troubles of the world? It wasn't too long ago that I realized how much bigger the story of my salvation stretches beyond myself.

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus' last words to His disciples were this: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The reason God has left us in the world is because we have a mission – the Great Commission – to fulfill. We are to stand as witnesses to the world. Salt and light. Ambassadors for Christ ushering broken humanity back to God.

The book of Acts describes how the early church initiated the fulfillment of the Great Commission. First, Jerusalem was evangelized (Acts 1-7); then the Spirit expanded the church into Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12); and lastly, the gospel began to spread to the "end of the earth" (Acts 13-28).

And what type of people does God choose as instruments for His purpose? The Bible gives us constant reminders that He can use anyone, regardless of their characteristics, abilities, or history. The Apostle Paul, for example, was a self-proclaimed "blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent" of Christ, the "foremost" of sinners (1 Timothy 1:13-15). But his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus was a watershed moment in the expansion of the gospel. One of Jesus' biggest persecutors became the gospel's greatest preacher, bringing the message of salvation to "everyone who believes," including the Gentiles (Romans 1:16).

Paul's testimony of his salvation is repeated three times in the Book of Acts. (Personally, I think the deliberate repetition is God's way of saying it louder for the people in the back!) Near the end of Acts, we're shown two distinct times that Paul sets himself aside to give his witness for Christ: once before an angry mob of his Jewish brethren in Jerusalem (Acts 22), and again before King Agrippa while under custody in Caesarea (Acts 26). In both cases, Paul delivers a testimony of who he was before, and who he became after his conversion. This man had experienced a complete transformation of heart, and his mind was opened to understand that everything in the Scriptures pointed



to the suffering and death, resurrection and glory of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. At his salvation, Jesus gave Paul the appointed purpose of standing before the unbelieving world "to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:18).

Paul witnessed so boldly and confidently because he knew he was doing God's will. Fear of persecution never stopped him, but neither did his pride. Paul cherished the gospel of grace so deeply because he understood the weight of his sin and self-righteousness. He understood that his salvation was a gift, and that his purpose was to be a witness for Jesus. Although Paul dealt with frustration and discouragement after becoming a Christian, he fully trusted in the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish God's will. And his obedience led many to saving faith in Jesus Christ. God didn't just save Paul from something; God saved him for something. Paul saw that he was saved to glorify God and show His infinite goodness to the world, so that others may also believe and be saved. Do you see your salvation in the same way?

#### Questions:

1. Have you been saved? What is the story of your salvation?
2. In what ways could you be better fulfilling your purpose?
3. What about today's world makes it easier or harder to be Jesus' witnesses to the "end of the earth"?