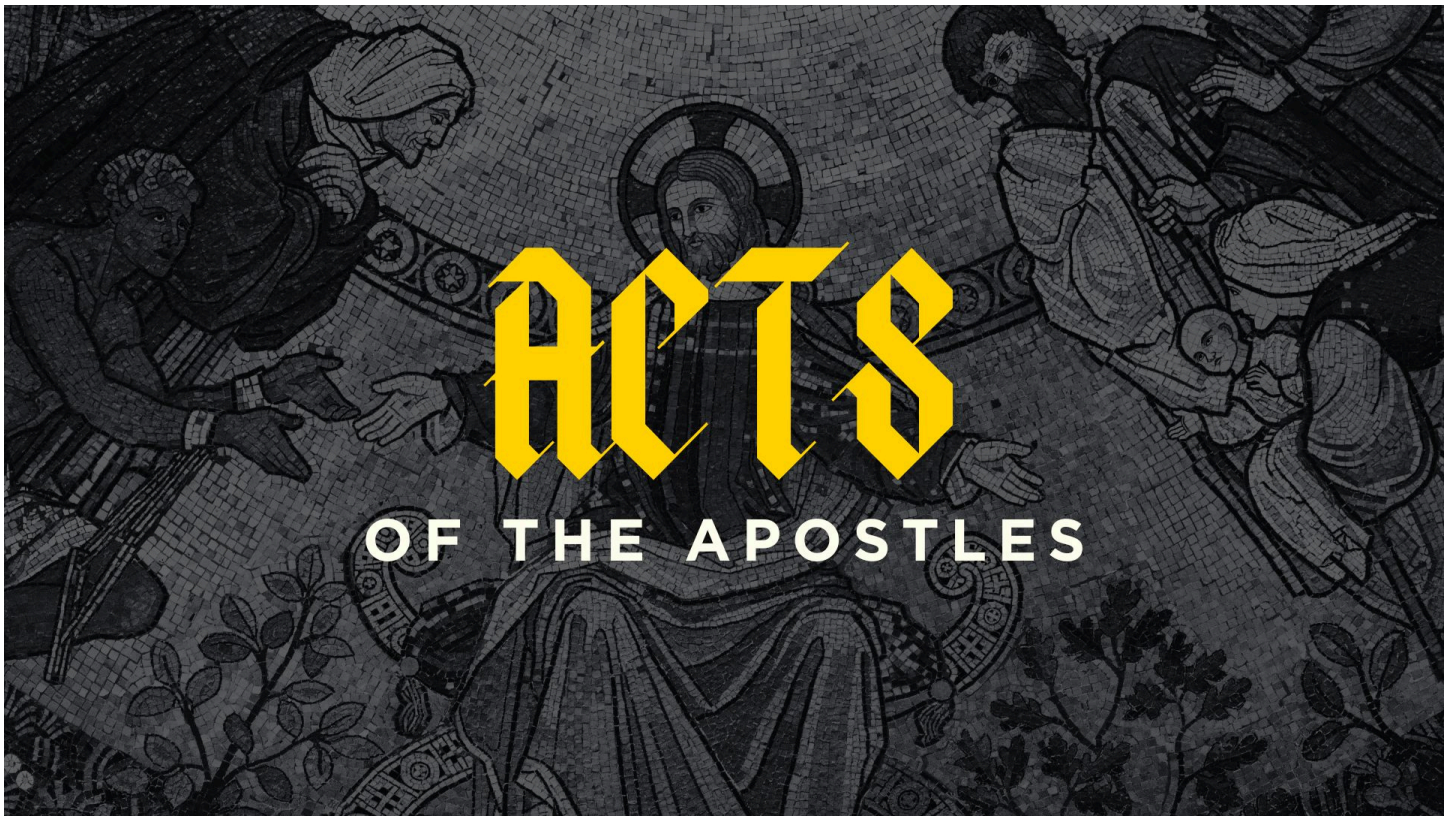




August 10, Acts Series

Paul's Story

Acts 22:12–16 (ESV) 12 “And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, 13 came to me, and standing by me said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. 14 And he said, ‘The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; 15 for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.’

We’re jumping back into our journey through the book of Acts, and all along we’ve said that this history of the early church can be summed up this way: The resurrected Jesus goes up to heaven, The Holy Spirit of God comes down to the earth, and in the power of the Spirit, the message of the gospel of Christ goes out to the very ends of the earth.

- The end of Paul’s third missionary journey is where we pick up, in Chapter 21.
- He visits with the leaders: James (Jesus’ own brother) and the elders. They all praise God together.
- But there is criticism. In Acts 15, the conference in Jerusalem decided that Gentile converts to Jesus had no obligation to conform to the Law of Moses. But some claimed that Paul was applying that even to Jewish converts to Jesus. It wasn’t true.
- One way to deal with this was to meet with all the critics and explain thoroughly what he had really said, but James and the Elders came up with a better solution: show them.
- So that’s what Paul did. He sponsors some men who have taken a vow to God. He takes a vow himself. And they all keep this vow together in the Temple.

- All was well until the last day of the vow. Paul is in the temple and Jews from Asia see him. They accuse Paul of bringing a Gentile into the temple. It's not true. But they claim it, and it's on.
- The whole city is fired up. And an angry mob descends on Paul. They begin to beat him.
- Roman authorities intervene and arrest Paul. He is surely the cause of the trouble.
- Paul speaks to the arresting commander in Greek. This surprises the Roman. He immediately sees Paul in a new light. This is not an insurrectionist.
- Paul asks to speak to the crowd that has just beat him, and the officer lets him.
- Paul doesn't say one single solitary thing about the charges that have been made against him. He says: *This is my defense. But it's not that I never brought a Gentile into the temple. **It's that Jesus changed my life.***
- Luke gives Paul's conversion story three different times in the book of Acts. Chapter 9. Here in Chapter 22. And again in Chapter 26. 3 times.
- Here in Chapter 22, let's latch on to three questions. They are the questions we all have to answer if we're ever to give our lives to Jesus. As we go, 1) Have you asked these questions yourself? and 2) Could you help someone else as they ask these questions?

"Who are you, Lord?"

- In the beginning of Paul's story he absolutely knew who God was. More importantly, he knew who God was not. He knew God couldn't be a human being.
- So anyone who did say Jesus was God was worthy of death. Paul persecuted Christians to the death. He put them in prison. Both men and women.
- Paul's God was one that fit all his sensibilities and all his views.
- But then Paul is on the road to Damascus to round up more Christians. He is struck by a light. It knocks him to the ground. He meets a God unlike anything he'd thought.
- He hears a voice say, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*" And he responds with the first question we all have to ask if we're going to ever know God: **"Who are you, Lord?"**
- Paul was sure he knew who God was. But on the road, he realized he had don't the first clue about who God really was. And it changed Paul completely.
- Paul found that when the light of heaven hits you, it doesn't matter what you think about God. What matters is who he thinks about you.
- **Who are you, Lord?** A voice replies, "*I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.*"
- And in those words, Paul realized that all he thought could never be true of God absolutely was.
- The voice. The light. The appearance. The words that were spoken to Paul as he is blinded by the light, are all objectively real things that all point to one true fact. That Jesus Christ was raised physically, bodily from the dead.
- To become a Christian is is not to respond to some emotional experience. To become a Christian is to respond to the historical reality that Jesus Christ was raised physically from the dead.
- When Paul is struck on the road, he sees Jesus alive. It converts him.

- All your objections are secondary when you see that Jesus is alive.

What shall I do, Lord?

- The one glaring reality Paul knew was that he still lacked something. A revelation of Jesus doesn't automatically mean salvation in Jesus. The question comes out of that conclusion. *What shall I do Lord?*
- Jesus says to Saul (vs 10), *Go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.* The word appointed means "assignment." Paul will be given an assignment.
- Vs 12: A man named Ananias comes to see Paul. Ananias gives Paul his assignment.
- (22:16) Ananias says to Saul: *"And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."*

The assignment is a list of three things:

- *Rise and be baptized*
- *wash your sins away*
- *Calling on his name*
- Ananias assigns Paul a task he couldn't do. A task he could do. And a task we would all assume should be done another way.
- The task Paul couldn't do: **wash your sins away.**
- This is one of two imperative commands here. The assignment is, Paul, *get your sins forgiven.* Now think about that. That's an impossible assignment!
- It's impossible for someone to wash away their own sins. The washing away of sin is an act only God himself can do. How can he possibly do such a thing?
- Here's the answer: It's fruitless to instruct Paul to do something he couldn't do unless there was something that he could do. Is there something here that he could do?
- Yes. It's the one other imperative command in this text. What shall I do Lord? **Rise and be baptized.** He can do that.
- And he must do that in order to have his sins washed away. The number and the order of imperative statements here tell us that *baptism is a condition for having our sins washed away.*
- This isn't the only place in the NT that we get that truth. See 1 Corinthians 6:11, Hebrews 10:22, Titus 3:5-6, John 3:3-5, Ephesians 5:25-26, 1 Peter 3:21.
- A task Paul couldn't do. A task Paul could do. And then, a task we would assume should be done another way: **Calling on his name.**
- Joel 2:32 – *"and it will come about that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be delivered."*
- Peter echoes the text in Acts 2:21 – *"everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"*
- Paul quotes it in Romans 10:13: *"Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved."* In all these texts, Jesus Christ is the name being called upon. His name is the only one that can save.

- So how do we call on the name of Jesus for salvation? The great assumption is that we would just call out. That we would pray and ask Jesus to save us in his name.
- This is, in fact, what Paul has no doubt been doing. If you go back to chapter 9, Paul is blind, and it's three days before Ananias comes to him. During that three days he's praying and fasting.
- And for all that prayer, salvation has not yet come. The whole point of Ananias instructing Paul to be baptized...*calling upon his name*...is ***so that Paul can be saved***.
- What Ananias teaches us that calling on the name of the Lord for salvation is accomplished in the act of baptism.
- We assume we are to call upon the name of the Lord in prayer. What if baptism is that prayer? That's what this text is telling us.
- It's only Jesus that has promised to stand with me. It's only Jesus that has a winning case he can argue in my defense. It's only Jesus that has paid the price of my sin. It's only the name of Jesus. Calling on his name is the only salvation I have.
- How do I do that? *Get up, be baptized, wash your sins away, calling on his name.*

Who are you Lord?

What shall I do Lord?

Third question. It's from the lips of Ananias. All we have to do is ask it today:

What are you waiting for?