

The Discipline of Disciple-Making: Sharing Our Master's Message

Acts 9-13

Jesus came into the world to seek and to save the lost; and that is what it says as we open to Luke 19:10. Jesus spent three plus years talking to groups, and individuals, pointing them to salvation. Then He died for sinners, commending God's love towards us, as Paul said. That is the heart of our Savior. That is the love of Christ. Jesus is still seeking and saving the lost, every day, all over the world; and He will keep doing that until the last moments of human life on Earth before the end.

IF YOU WANT TO BE NEAR JESUS: SHARE HIS GOSPEL.

Each time we share the Gospel, He's always right there. When anyone gets saved, Christ is right next to them, as He saves them. Everything important for now and eternity is tied to the Gospel of our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ.

That's why we are looking at Christ's hand off of the plan of salvation to His Apostles. They learned for 3-plus years, then, listened to one last briefing, and then they launched out in the power of the Spirit.

The commission of Christ was to evangelize the lost and then train every convert in following Christ. That equals making and training followers, or disciples, of Christ.

Last week we began a survey of each of the "making disciples" passages in the Book of Acts.

MAKING DISCIPLES IS WHAT JESUS CHRIST CALLED LEADING PEOPLE TO SALVATION.

A person must be saved to follow Christ; and everyone who follows Christ is His disciple.

So the Book of Acts shows how the early church evangelized, or "made disciples" in the 1st Century. As we read each of these 22 accounts we must always remember that there were dozens, hundreds, and thousands who were saved in those early decades. But, these 22 accounts are what God uses to illustrate how He wants us to see it done.

The Book of Acts lets us see and hear what happened. These are divinely chosen snapshots. Each is equally powerful, moving, and instructive. All of these accounts are just an expansion of the final Gospel challenge that Jesus Christ gave to the disciples before He launched them. Never forget what our Lord Jesus Christ explained as:

THE CORE OF THE GOSPEL PRESENTATION

In Luke 24:44-47 we find Jesus summarizing His ministry and formulating the sending off charge to His disciples, describing the content of their evangelistic ministries. Please follow along in your Bibles as I read His charge:

Luke 24:45-47 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. 46 Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, 47 “and that **repentance and remission of sins** should be **preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.**

Now as we turn to Acts we are actually turning on what would almost appear to be a slide-show with 22 scenes, that covers the first 30 years of Christ's Church.

1ST CENTURY EVANGELISM DISPLAYED

Acts is a divinely recorded and edited presentation of how for 30 years the greatest message ever given was shared, by the greatest witnesses ever chosen. You see, the Holy Spirit empowered the Apostles to go and take the Gospel to the World. The Book of Acts is our most critical insight into how they shared the Gospel!

MESSAGE ONE (Peter): In the first presentation of the Gospel in Acts 2:21, 37-38, **God saves** those who call on His Name, repent, have their sins remitted, and receive the Holy Spirit:

And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord **shall be saved.**
Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, **what shall we do?**” 38 Then Peter said to them, “**Repent,** and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins;** and you **shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**”

MESSAGE TWO (Peter): In the second Gospel presentation in Acts 3:19,26 we see that **God turns us:**

v. 19 “**Repent therefore and be converted,** that your **sins may be blotted out,** so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,
v. 26 “To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in **turning away every one of you from your iniquities.**”

What is the message? Peter actually states two parts: **repent** and **turn.** We believe, changing our mind about God; and God turns us away from sin.

Sin no longer is dearest to us: God is. The turning is God turning us towards Himself. That is what a believer is, one turned by God towards following Christ.

MESSAGE THREE (Peter): In the third Gospel presentation in Acts 4:12, **God saves us:**

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which **we must be saved.**”

MESSAGE FOUR (Peter): The next Gospel Presentation comes in Acts 5:31-32, as Peter says **God forgives and gives His Spirit to those that obey Him:**

“Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give **repentance** to Israel and **forgiveness of sins.** 32 “And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to **those who obey Him.**”

MESSAGE FIVE (Philip & Peter): The next Gospel Presentation shows us for the first time a false believer. Jesus warned of this in the Gospels, now we see it. Note Acts 8:13:

Then Simon himself also **believed;** and when he **was baptized** he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs, which were done.

So he believed and was baptized, but something was missing. When the Apostle Peter who has given every recorded Gospel Message in Acts so far shows up to confirm the veracity of this evangelistic outreach, he declares something was lacking from this man's conversion. Listen and note the report in Acts 8:21-23:

“You have **neither part nor portion in this matter** (what matter? Salvation), for your **heart is not right in the sight of God.** (Wow, what makes a heart right in God's sight Peter?) 22 “**Repent** therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be **forgiven** you. 23 “For I see that you are **poisoned** by bitterness and **bound** by iniquity.”

Simon believed and was baptized but did not receive the Holy Spirit, which was the seal of true conversion and New Birth.

This means that belief and baptism without repentance was insufficient.

He never repented of his sin so he was never saved! Salvation again is stated by Peter to involve a turning from sin, which is called repentance and conversion.

MESSAGE SIX (Philip): The next Gospel Presentation is in Acts 8:35-37:

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning **at this Scripture, preached Jesus** to him. 36 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” 37 Then Philip said, “**If you believe**

with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

The summary after six Gospel Presentations: *really repent, turn away from iniquity, be saved from sins, by God’s forgiveness, and by believing with all your heart.* Jesus said that truly saved people: *turn from doing their own will and going their own way, to doing God’s will and way.* You say, that sounds impossible. It is humanly, that is why only those *born from above* are truly saved.

MESSAGE SEVEN (Jesus): The next Gospel Presentation is in Acts 9:1-6 which records the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, into Paul the Apostle. This event is described at length in Acts 22:4-10 and again in Acts 26:11-18.

Something to note is that when Jesus saves someone, He is right there, dealing with them. If you are leading someone to Christ, do you think about Christ being right there with you?

Also, Jesus Christ so clearly identifies with us as His disciples that: *when we are attacked, He is attacked!*

Acts 9:1-6 (NKJV) Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. 4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, **why are you persecuting Me?**” 5 And he said, “**Who are You, Lord?**” Then the Lord said, “**I am Jesus**, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” 6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, “**Lord, what do You want me to do?**” Then the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

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MESSAGE EIGHT (Peter): The next Gospel Presentation is in Acts 10:35-43 where salvation is described as *believing, receiving remission of sins, and God granting repentance.*

Acts 10:36, 39-43 (NKJV) The word which God sent to the children of Israel, **preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—** 39 And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they **killed by hanging on a tree.** 40 Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. 42 And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. 43 To Him all the prophets witness that, **through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.**”

MESSAGE NINE (Peter & others): The next Gospel Presentation is in 11:17-21 where salvation is described as *believing and turning.*

Acts 11:17-21 (NKJV) If therefore **God gave** them the same gift as *He gave* us **when we believed** on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” ¹⁸When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, “**Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.**” ¹⁹Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, **preaching the word** to no one but the Jews only. 20 But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number **believed and turned to the Lord.**

The vocabulary of salvation in Acts is very rich, “believe” 39x; “repent(ance)”¹ 11x; “turn” 9x. These all describe the same supernatural event.

MESSAGE TEN (Paul): The next Gospel Presentation is in Acts 13:38-43 where salvation is described as *forgiveness of everything to all who believe.*

Acts 13:38-43 (NKJV) Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that **through this Man** is preached to you the **forgiveness of sins**; 39 and by Him **everyone who believes is justified from all things** from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. 40 Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: 41 ‘Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, A work which you will by no means believe, Though one were to declare it to you.’” 42 So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the **Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them** the next Sabbath. 43 Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to **continue in the grace of God.**

¹ Revelation also contains “repent” 12x with 8x in Christ's words to the churches: Ephesus 2x; Smyrna 0x; Pergamos 1x; Thyatira 3x; Sardis 1x; Philadelphia 0 x; and Laodicea 1x.

Here we find again the term “believed” used 39x in Acts to describe people’s response to the salvation message. As we already saw in Acts 8, there are some who “believe” but are not saved. Jesus warned us of this.

What does it mean to believe? Jesus has defined that for us in John 2:23-24; 3:14-18.

John 2:23-24 (NKJV) Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, **many believed in His name** when they saw the signs which He did. 24 But **Jesus did not commit Himself to them**, because He knew all men,

John 3:14-18 (NKJV) And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 **that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life**. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18 “He who **believes in Him** is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Belief was further defined in John 20:31 as believing WHO Jesus Christ really is; and later in 1st Corinthians 15:3-4 it is also in WHAT He did. Who Christ is and What He did is what these early followers shared. Real belief in the real Jesus is what was being preached way back then, as the Gospel spread.

Turn onward to Acts 15:13. Do you remember who was the first Pastor of the First Church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17)? It was Christ's own earthly brother James.

Remember, the first church was in Jerusalem, right? The first pastor of that First Church was James. His sermons to the saints of the First Church are still available for us to read. In James 2:14-17 that first pastor, strongly challenged those large crowds that were swept along at the events of Pentecost and surrounding the birth of the early church. One of James’ messages was to:

BEWARE OF BEING JUST 18-INCHES FROM HEAVEN

Has all that you know about God traveled yet, those 18 inches from ***your head*** (intellectual knowledge) to ***your heart*** (intimately, personally making a choice of your will to embrace Jesus as Lord and Savior)?

Listen to James as a concerned pastor, challenging them as Paul later would say, “to examine” their faith.

James 2:14-17 (NKJV) **What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?** 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 **Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**

These words echoed Christ's words in Matthew 7:21-23 when He solemnly declared:

BEWARE OF MERE INTELLECTUAL BELIEF

Saving faith is life-changing faith. If there is not a changed life and resultant good works, that profession is a false profession. That kind of faith is dead faith.

Thus also faith **by itself**, if it does not have works, is dead. (James 2:17, NKJV)

True saving faith can never be by itself: it always brings life, and life produces good works. James gives a second sobering call to those who appeared to be believers in that earliest of all churches when he said in James 2:18-19 (NKJV):

But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. **Even the demons believe—and tremble!**

BEWARE OF MERE EMOTIONAL BELIEF

Demons have strong faith that is intellectual and emotional.

To illustrate this mere intellectual or emotional faith that is dead, James uses one of the most unbelievable comparisons. He explains the inner workings of the spirit world. Only here do we see applied, what the Gospels so clearly illustrate—the complete intellectual and emotional faith of demons that can never save them.

BEWARE OF DEMON FAITH

It may shock you, but God's Word testifies that demons have faith! What do they believe? If you analyzed all the times that the Gospels capture demon's responses you would find that:

Demons completely believe in the reality of God. They have no doubts. They have seen the Lord, seen His Throne, know all about the spiritual world, and have met Jesus Christ personally. Demons could never be classified as either atheists or agnostics. They had an accurate faith in God intellectually, in their minds. You can believe all the correct facts and not be saved.

Demons completely believe in the Deity of God. Demons trembled in Christ's presence while He walked the Earth. They have no doubts about who He really is. Often we hear the demons publicly stating to Jesus, “I know who You are” (Mark 3:11-12, 5:7). Demons had an emotional response to their faith, they feared, shuddered, and trembled.

Demons completely believe in the Supreme Power Christ held over their destiny.

They even would plead for some leniency, or mercy from Jesus Christ as the ultimate Judge who held their eternal destiny in His Hands (Mark 5:1–13). Demons had a firm intellectual faith.

Demons completely believed in Hell and the horror of eternal punishment. They knew and testified to people that they believed in the existence of a place of punishment, and knew that they were headed towards torment (Mark 5:7), and said that they didn't want to go there "before the time" (Matthew 8:39). Demons had a firm emotional faith.

Demons completely believe in submission to God's Word. They never expressed doubt that His Word was true, and they usually instantly obeyed, though a few did one final shake of their victim, or convulsion just to show their malignant hearts. So as James repeats, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder" (James 2:19, NIV). Believing to the point of fear and trembling does not save. Only a life-changing faith, produced by God within, can save.

Now we need to apply this sermon James has just preached to our lives today. Just knowing and believing the FACTS is NOT enough.

First, an **intellectual agreement or assent** doesn't save us. That is James' point—intellectual belief is present in demons.

Second, an **emotional response**, coupled with an intellectual response is also not sufficient. Demons had regular emotional responses to their faith in Christ as Creator, as Omnipotent Ruler, and as the Ultimate Judge. None of those intellectual and emotional responses prompted by their faith were sufficient.

Third, true **saving faith** only comes from God's grace at work in a life. Saving faith is a repentant faith that comes from God and always results in a changed life. That's why God's grace is so amazing: it saves wretches like each of us really are.

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found,
was blind but now I see.