

## Acts Series #22 - "The Mission - Part 2"

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. "What Is A Christian?"

1. A small boy sat in church with his mother and listened to a sermon titled, "What is a Christian?"
2. Every time the minister asked the question, he banged his fist on the pulpit for emphasis
3. The tension produced by the sermon and the repeated pounding built up in the boy
4. Finally he whispered to his mother, "Mama, do you know? Do you know what a Christian is?"
5. "Yes dear," she said. "Now sit still and be quiet."
6. Finally, as the minister was winding, he again thundered, "WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?" and banged especially hard on the pulpit
7. This was too much for the little guy and he jumped up and cried out, "Tell him, Mama. Oh please tell him before he breaks something!"

#### B. Today

1. We're continuing today with a subject we began last week
2. We too are considering what a Christian is by taking a look v. 18 of Acts 26
3. Paul is giving his testimony to King Agrippa
4. Beginning at v. 12, Paul told of how Jesus had confronted him on the road to Damascus
5. In that first encounter with Christ, not only did Jesus reveal Himself to Paul as the Messiah and Lord, but He also gave him a mission
6. We find that mission in vs. 17 & 18 . . .

### II. TEXT

#### A. Vs. 17-18

{17} 'I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you,

{18} 'to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

1. Not only do these words define Paul's life's mission, they also reveal what it means to be a Christian
2. Last week we considered the first part of the v. 18
  - a. we saw that Christians are those who have been converted,
  - b. who have been turned from darkness to light
  - c. and from the power of Satan to God
  - d. their eyes have been opened to the truth and light and life that is in Christ and Christ alone

3. Today we will be looking at the rest of the verse

## **B. Forgiveness**

1. Look at what Jesus told Paul
2. He sent him to preach the gospel . . .

. . . **that they may receive forgiveness of sins**

3. We speak of forgiveness of sins so often as Christians, we may lose appreciation for it
4. If the old adage that “familiarity breeds contempt” is true, then we are in danger of considering contemptible our forgiveness by God
5. Such ought not to be!
6. Rather, thankfulness and praise should well up from our hearts and mouths throughout the day and night
7. Think of it--as Christians, we are forgiven!
8. If my saying doesn't make your heart beat a little faster,
  - a. if those words don't bring a smile to your face,
  - b. and make you want to shout “HALLELUJAH!!!”
  - c. then chances are you've lost touch of the reality & preciousness of the work of Christ for you
9. You see, forgiveness will only be a cause of joy & celebration if you are mindful of the holiness of God and your own unworthiness to stand before Him
10. Let me use an illustration
  - a. Let's say you use your credit card to buy some item that costs a mere \$15
  - b. a month later you get a bill. Get out your checkbook, and write a check to pay off the balance that is only that \$15 charge
  - c. You don't sweat it because the bill was small and you have plenty in your checking
  - d. the debt was easily paid

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  - e. now let's move to another situation
  - f. Let's say you are the heir to your grandfather's estate and he passes away leaving everything to you
  - g. the problem is, he's amassed, not a *fortune*, but a *massive debt*
  - h. and dozens of creditors line up to badger you to pay up
  - i. you go to court and complain, but the judge tells you you have to pay
  - j. and every day the interest keeps adding to the debt
  - k. every day sees you sink further and further into the hole
  - l. then all the creditors band together, hire a lawyer and start proceedings to garnish your wages and file liens on every bit of your property - including your toothbrush
  - m. your situation is utterly hopeless – there is no way you could ever repay the debt

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  - n. now, if you've ever been in deep financial debt, you know the darkness and despair that threatens to overwhelm you.

- o. but let's say that in the moment of your deepest despair there comes a knock at your door
  - p. you go to answer it and find a man there who greets you by name and tells you he has come for one reason
  - q. he wants to pay off your entire debt
    - 1) and not over time
    - 2) no, he wants to write one check and in a moment of time erase the entire debt
    - 3) and here's the catch = THERE IS NONE!
  - r. all you have to do is accept his offer
  - s. in one glorious moment you go from the depths of despair to the height of joy & celebration
11. This is precisely the state we were in before we were converted
- a. as the heirs of Adam, we inherited sin with all its debt
  - b. each day we kept adding to that debt with our own contributions of sin
  - c. and each moment that passed, another grain of sand slipped through the hourglass of our lives
  - d. time was running out, and our account was coming due
  - e. Satan threatened to file a final liens on us and garnish or very lives
  - f. but Jesus knocked on our door and offered to pay off our entire debt
  - g. all we had to do was accept Him as Savior and Lord
  - h. the deal was struck and all our sins were forgiven
12. It's rather sad how many Christians have come to think that the first illustration is more like them than the last
- a. they see their debt more like a \$15 bill they can easily pay off
  - b. rather than a massive debt they could never, ever pay off
  - c. the reality of forgiveness holds forth the prospect of little joy to them because they have forgotten how great was their need
13. In Luke 18:9-14 Jesus told a story about two men who went to the temple to pray
- a. one was a good Pharisee, the other a tax collector
  - b. tax collectors were utterly despised by their fellow Jews
    - 1) they were outcasts, hated
    - 2) they were considered as traitors because they collected taxes for the hated Romans who ruled the land
    - 3) tax collectors were the dung on the sandals of the good Jews
  - c. though they were generally wealthy, having grown rich off the graft they managed to squeeze from the people, this particular tax collector came to see that money doesn't satisfy
  - d. so he went to the temple at the hour of prayer to seek peace for his soul
  - e. but the moment he enters the courtyard, he is reminded of the holiness and purity of God by the majesty of the temple
  - f. he is cut to the heart as he considers the greed and theft that marks his own life
  - g. he has come to seek God, but now, as he tried to draw near, he sees himself as unworthy
  - h. he may be rich in money but he is desperately poor in spirit

- i. his steps grow timid and he retreats to the shadows of the marble pillars bordering the courtyard
- j. he bows his head, his eyes fill with tears and wet the pavement at his feet
- k. this man, so clever at devising ways to increase his purse can now find no words to say but these = “GOD HAVE MERCY ON ME, A SINNER!”

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- l. at the same hour, another man comes: he is a Pharisee and religious man who lives by a strict set of rules
  - m. every day he comes to the temple at this hour to pray
  - n. as he climbs the steps to the temple mount he passes the same people he has passed for years
  - o. they greet one another with a nod of recognition
  - j. it warms him to think of what a good example he is of devotion; for everyday, without fail he climbs those steps and nods to those same faces -
  - k. they all know where he is going - to pray!
  - l. his steps are strong and purposeful as he makes his way across the courtyard to his customary place
  - m. as he prays, he looks neither up in worship, nor down in remorse
  - n. no, he looks sideways in comparison to the others who have gathered to pray
  - o. his eyes scan the crowd and see the sins written so clearly on their faces
  - p. then he spies the tax collector in the shadows
  - q. and he is pleased with the comparison
  - r. he prays, “God, I thank you that I am not like these others; robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even that tax collector over there. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.”
  - s. he stands there proud of himself
    - 1) he is an example to others
    - 2) he fasts twice a week, above the requirements of the law
    - 2) he is careful to tithe above the practice of his peers
  - t. taking inventory, he is satisfied with the account of his life

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- u. the tax collector, however, is not!
  - v. he stands at a distance, weeping
  - w. he is painfully aware of his debt to God
  - x. that’s why his eyes are downcast and he beats his chest with his fist
  - 14. Jesus concludes the story by saying that it wasn’t the Pharisee who went away justified
  - 15. It was the tax collector
  - 16. In terms of comparison of lifestyles, the Pharisee was much more righteous
  - 17. But the point Jesus was making was that we are not to draw our sense of righteousness by comparing with one another
  - 18. Rather, we need to compare ourselves against God
  - 19. And when we do, we quickly realize that distance between each other is nothing when compared to the distance from God

20. When Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus was on his deathbed, his students came to him and asked him to teach them the greatest lesson he had learned
21. His last words were, "When you pray, remember before whom you stand."

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22. Our God is holy & righteous
  23. He is perfect in all His ways
  24. We are not! And He would be completely just to banish us to an eternity of torment
  25. But He offers forgiveness and pardon

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26. I think we get a bit confused on what it means when it says that God forgives us because we think of forgiveness in human terms
  27. But God's forgiveness is different than our forgiveness
  28. When God forgives, it means He releases us from the judicial punishment that is due us for our sin
  29. And when God forgives, He forgives *completely!*
  30. That means He *forgets* our sin
  31. In Hebrews 8:12 we read God saying

**"I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."**

32. We find it hard to relate to this because it's something we simply cannot do
33. We may forgive someone for a wrong done us, but we can't forget it
  - a. in fact, sometimes, we think we've forgiven someone
  - b. then weeks, months, or even years later we remember that wrong done to us
  - c. and find ourselves riding a roller coaster of emotions as we relive the hurt and emotions of that things as though it was a fresh wound
34. Very simply, God's forgiveness isn't like that
  - a. His forgiveness is perfect
  - b. when He forgives, He forgets!
  - c. He will never bring it up again

**Micah 7:19 He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.**

**Psalms 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.**

35. God wants you to know the extent and greatness of His forgiveness
36. For if you view God's forgiveness as partial or incomplete, then you will find it incredibly difficult in coming to Him
37. This is just human nature: If you think someone is upset with you, you don't want to be near them because you fear their wrath
38. Satan loves to cast God as mean-spirited and hard; the devil loves to cast God as frowning and tallying up our sins until they get to the magic number, whatever that is, and then He sends some major catastrophe to punish us
39. If the deceiver can cast God in that role, then we'll try to stay as far from Him as possible
40. A little boy went to visit his grandparents' farm and was given his first

- slingshot by the grandfather
- a. he went into the woods to practice but could never hit his target
  - b. returning to the yard. He spied his grandmother's pet duck, and without thinking, took aim and fired
  - c. sure enough, the rock caught the duck in the head and it fell dead
  - d. he hurried over, grabbed it and hid it in the wood pile
  - e. but when he turned around, he saw his sister watching him from the porch
  - f. after lunch that day the grandmother said, "Sally, let's wash the dishes."
  - g. but Sally said, "Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today. [Make motion of firing a slingshot] Didn't you Johnny?"
  - h. so Johnny did the dishes
  - i. later that afternoon, the grandfather wanted to take the children fishing but the grandmother said that she needed Sally to help her with making supper
  - j. Sally smiled and said, "That's all been taken care of. Johnny wants to do it." [Make motion again]
  - k. Sally went fishing and Johnny stayed behind to peel potatoes
  - l. after several days of doing both his chores and his sister's, he couldn't stand it anymore and went to confess to the grandmother
  - m. she said, "I know Johnny. I was standing at the window and saw the whole thing. Because I love you, and because you've confessed and asked to be forgiven, I forgive you. I was just wondering how long you would let Sally make a slave of you."
41. Christian, because of Jesus, God forgives us
- a. don't let the devil make a slave of you by putting false guilt on you
  - b. you see, God's forgiveness includes not only your past sins, but your present and future ones as well
42. Christians aren't just those who HAVE BEEN forgiven - they ARE forgiven; they stand in the place of forgiveness and pardon
43. And you know what - if that doesn't make you want to get up and dance, then I'm sorry but something's wrong!
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44. This is so incredible: But look! There is more here . . .

### **C. An Inheritance**

1. Not only are we forgiven but we have obtained an inheritance
2. God doesn't just pardon us, He does more
3. He makes us part of His family and writes us into His will
4. But it's a will that doesn't have to wait for His demise
5. It's available to us now because of the death of His Son
6. The moment we are born again into the family of God we become partakers of all He has
7. I could spend hours trying to describe for you the glory of our inheritance
8. But let me just quote the words of the Apostle Paul who in writing to the Corinthians said,

**Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things**

which God has prepared for those who love Him. [1]

9. Some of the most prolific and eloquent words ever to be penned or spoken are found in Ephesians Ch.1
  - a. it's there we find Paul trying to convey the glories of our inheritance in Christ
  - b. read that chapter this week; read it every day and ask God to help you understand what you find there
  - c. even Paul says,

**I do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. [2]**

10. Think of it: We go from being utterly bankrupt to being heirs of riches of heaven!
11. And it all comes as Paul says at the end of v. 18, by faith in Jesus
12. A man who owned a city newspaper had 3 sons.
  - a. he told them he would pass the paper's ownership to the son who could write the most sensational headline of only three words
  - b. the first son's headline was, "Reagan Turns Communist."
  - c. the second son concocted this: "Khomeini Becomes Christian."
  - d. but the third son inherited the newspaper when his headline was submitted. It had only two words, "Pope Elopes."
  - e. fortunately, we don't have to earn our spiritual inheritance by sensational works.
  - f. our inheritance is a gift freely given by faith in Jesus

#### ***D. Set Apart***

1. Finally, the Christian is someone who has been sanctified
2. There's a good old fashioned religious word that simply means to be set apart from what's merely common for the special purposes and use of God
3. Christian - because of your faith in Christ, you are set apart from others
4. While it's true that God loves the entire world, His special love and affection is set on those who have come to faith in Christ
5. You see, God created this entire universe as the theater to erect a stage
  - a. that stage is earth
  - b. and on that stage is unfolding a story of both love and hatred, or joy and sorrow
  - c. you see, God created all of this to make for Himself a people who

would receive His love, appreciate it, enjoy it, and of their own volition return it to Him

- d. history is neither a tragedy, nor a comedy; it's a romance
  - 1) certainly, there is plenty of both tragedy and comedy in it
  - 2) but ultimately, history is the Story of God securing for Himself an eternal companion who has *learned* to love Him

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. *Where The Action Is*

1. You want to know where the action is in the world today?
2. It's not down on City Walk in Westwood
3. It's not on Main Street in Ventura
4. It's not in the Oaks Mall or Malibu
5. It's not on Wall Street in NY or in the Oval Office of the White House
6. The real action is taking place quietly, in the daily lives of those who have been turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, who have been forgiven their sins and obtained an inheritance among those who are set apart by God through faith in Jesus Christ
7. Come be a part of the Action!

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[1] 1 Corinthians 2:9

[2] Ephesians 1:16-23