

What Shall I Do, Lord?

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[0:00] My name is Jim Shemaria, my wife Teresa, and we have a lot of connections with this church history and this church family. We both grew up in the Seattle area, attended the Berean Bible Church there.

And we were in Minneapolis for six years as a Christian ed pastor there. We returned to Seattle in 1984, and I served on staff there at the Berean Bible Church until 2021 when I retired.

We still attend there, so we were there for 37 years and served as Christian ed pastor and then as senior pastor. And we've had a lot of interaction with this church, the pastor, with all your pastors. And my son-in-law interned up here way back in 1997. He teaches at Grace Christian University now. And so we enjoy the privilege to be with you today.

This past week, of course, we all remembered and took time to pause on the tragedy of 9-11. And I'm sure that being the 25th anniversary, you probably took time to see some of the recap of it and consider it.

[1:02] And probably, for those of you that are old enough, let's take most of you except maybe one, you're old enough to maybe remember where you were exactly when you heard that news that it happened.

Right? Do you remember where you were? I remember where I was. I was here in Leavenworth. I was here in Leavenworth because we had our regional pastors, twice a year, our regional pastors for Idaho, Washington, and Oregon get together.

And we had 25, 30 of us at times from the boys' ranch and different ministries. And we would gather and we would come up here generally once a year, oftentimes in the fall.

And we had our meeting here at the church. And I was staying at somebody's house here right in town Monday night. And Tuesday mornings, I was kind of waking up, just sort of hearing the TV in the background.

They were in the kitchen getting breakfast ready. And thought, wow, something's going on. Right? And then came out and saw what it was. I remember exactly where I was. And what a shock, of course, that was.

[2:02] And it was good for us to take time to remember this last week. And for those who died, for those who rescued, it's just important that we do that.

There's something about major events like that, especially hard ones, that kind of just imprint in our minds.

Right? I remember as a kid, I can remember the day President Kennedy was shot. I can remember being on the playground at my school. And I can remember exactly where I was in that playground, at Bagley School in Seattle there, when I heard that news.

And, of course, all the rumors were flying. And they shot the Vice President. The Russians are coming. You know, all the news that the kids picked up and were circulating. I remember two earthquakes in Seattle.

They weren't as big as some of the other places, but the two biggest ones we've had since I've been alive, I can remember right where I was standing, right where I was doing when it started shaking. You remember those things, don't you?

[3:02] Those things imprint themselves, and you just sort of remember those, especially hard situations. Today, we're going to look at a situation from the book of Acts that was so important.

And I'll suggest to you, in some ways, it could have been very tragic, but also it was very remarkable. And it's so important that it's told three times. It's told three times. That doesn't happen very often.

I mean, in the Gospels, we get the stories of Christ three, four times, but from different books. This is one book, the book of Acts, and we get the account of this three times. And so we're going to look today at Acts 22.

And before we do, though, let's have a word of prayer. Fathers, we open your word. Our prayer always is that your word would be heard, and that you would open our hearts to it through the Holy Spirit, that we would engage with it, consider it, and your word would impact how we live and how we treat people.

And Father, we just thank you for this family here, this church family. We thank you for the desire to be together and support one another, encourage one another in this Lord's Day, day of resurrection. And so bless your word to our hearts now in Christ's name.

[4:06] Amen. So what we're going to look at today is the story of the Apostle Paul's conversion, his dramatic conversion. I understand the lady's Bible study just finished studying the book of Acts, so you probably all already know all this.

But anyway, we're going to cover it again. And, of course, we have it three times. We have it in Acts 9, where Luke, who was Paul's traveling companion, the physician, Luke the physician, he tells it, but, of course, he got the information from Paul.

But then twice in Paul's defense of himself in Acts 22 and in Acts 26, he retells it again. So we have it three times in the book of Acts.

It's a very important event and very monumental event that obviously imprinted itself on memories and on thoughts. And so Acts 22, we're going to see Paul's apologia, his defense of what he's doing.

But the background to it is that there is a ruckus in Jerusalem. Paul has come down to Jerusalem. And when he comes there, because he has traveled, he has had his missionary journeys, and he has come back to Judea, come back to Jerusalem.

[5:23] And when he gets there, the believers that are there, in verse 20 of chapter 21, they say, when they heard this, just before in verse 19, what God had done among the Gentiles, the non-Jews, through his ministry.

And when they heard this, they praised God. And they said, Brother Paul, you see how many thousands of Jews have believed. And all of them are very zealous for the law.

Thousands. This is not a small movement in Jerusalem and Judea. We read in the book of Acts that myriads of priests, thousands, hundreds maybe of priests, have come to the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see that earlier in the book of Acts. We know that Pharisees came to Christ. The common people came to Christ. And they said, look, there are thousands of people here.

But Paul, they are still zealous for the Mosaic law. They are still going to synagogue. They are still going to temple. They are coming to houses of worship, right?

[6:27] The churches, like a house group, a small group, a bigger group, they would meet on Sunday, because that was the first day of the week, day of resurrection. The synagogue meeting was Saturday.

And they are doing both, many of them, because they're Jews. Nowhere were they told, in order to be a Christian, you have to quit being a Jew, right? This is like when we send missionaries out. You talk about your missions conference, and they go to different cultures and so on. We don't tell them you have to become Americans to become a Christian, right? But if there's cultural things, just like in our culture, that are anti-Christian, of course, they have to deal with that.

But these Jews were still, they were Christians. They were believers in Jesus, the Messiah. That was a Jewish context. And so they say, look at Paul, we need you to do something, because there's some controversy here.

And the controversy is, verse 21, they have been informed that you teach the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs.

[7:34] What shall we do? Well, of course, that wasn't true. Nowhere in Paul's ministry, in his letters, or in the recording of his mystery journeys, has he ever told Jews, you have to quit being a Jew.

What he said is, we are all saved by God's grace, Jew and Gentile, we are equal in Christ. You can't impose that upon the Gentiles, because it doesn't make any difference.

We are saved apart from the works of the law. For by grace are you saved, what? Through faith, not of yourselves, it's the gift of God. It's apart from any works of the law that doesn't save you.

But he didn't go around telling Jews to quit being Jews. He said, we are one in Christ. And so they said, well, look, we need you to go in and offer a sacrifice. So he did that. And he went in there, and he went in and gave a sacrifice.

And the person he took with him, all of a sudden, the rumor spread, he's brought a Gentile into the temple to offer sacrifice. And the people were in uproar. And their uproar, and it says, in verse 28, they were shouting, men of Israel, help us.

[8:38] This man who teaches all men everywhere against our people, our law in this place. He's brought Greeks into the temple, Gentiles, non-Jews. He's defiled this place. And they come in an uproar, and they grab him.

In verse 30, they seize Paul. They dragged him. And they were going to kill him. I mean, look what it says there in verse 31. While they were trying to kill him. Because this controversy, and they were obviously working this up, right?

Trying to get the crowd, just like they did with Jesus, to try and get rid of this leader of the Christian sect, the way, the believers in Jesus. And so this leads to Paul with the Romans who grabbed him and took him for his own safety.

And then he asked if I could speak to them. You notice in verse 37, as the soldiers were about to take Paul in the barracks, he said to the commander, may I say something to you?

Do you speak Greek? He replied. Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led 4,000 terrorists out? Wait a minute. We thought you were this Egyptian terrorist, a Jew. You speak in Greek.

[9:44] Well, Paul was a very educated man. Because he came from the Greek context of Tarsus, he spoke Greek, he spoke Hebrew, he spoke Aramaic, which is a sister tongue of Hebrew, which was the common tug.

Paul says, no, verse 39. I am a Jew. I am a Jew from Tarsus. And by the way, I am a what? Citizen of no ordinary city.

Let me speak. Well, the minute Paul raises the fact he's a citizen, they have to back off. Maybe his soldiers may not have even been citizens. Because he had rights and he had protection of the Roman government because he was a citizen.

He could travel freely. He had protection. And he could make use of everything a citizen could use. So they said, okay, you can speak to them. So I want you to notice, this is Paul's account of his dramatic conversion.

You're probably familiar with Acts chapter 9 where Luke tells a story. They're very similar as it is in chapter 26. But each event, each telling adds a little bit something the other doesn't.

[10:49] I wanted to look at this one this morning. So they get everybody together. Verse 40 of chapter 21. Having received the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps, motioned to the crowd, where they were all silent.

And he said to them in Aramaic, which is a sister language to Hebrew. Okay? You might think of like English to King James English to Old English. Do you ever try and look at like an English from the 1400s where the letters are different and so on?

You know, but it's Hebrew. It's Hebrew, okay? Paul says this, brothers and fathers, listen now to my apologia, my apologetics, my defense.

And when they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. Who is this guy? He speaks Greek. He speaks Aramaic. Well, a lot of the people in the crowd knew him because they were his compatriots from his former life.

They knew who he was. But as he gathers these men, he says, brothers and fathers, these are the leaders of Israel in the crowd, and they are there in the crowd. Paul says to them, I am a Jew born in Tarsus of Cilicia, which he says is no mean city.

[12:05] It was known for its fabric industry. And it was a center of trade. Paul says, I was born in, I am a Jew born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but I was brought up in this city under Gamaliel.

I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers, and I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. I want to stop there and just reflect for a minute on Paul's background, his rabbinic, his background, his authority to teach.

He sat at the feet of Gamaliel. Now, you might remember from study of Acts, if you go back to chapter 5, is the other place where we encounter Gamaliel.

And this time, it is with Peter and the apostles who have been arrested. And they are trying to kill them as well. And this is earlier in Acts.

And this is the account where when they are told to quit preaching about Jesus, what do they say? They say in verse 29 of chapter 5, we must obey God rather than man.

[13 : 21] God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead. You killed him by hanging him on a tree. He's exalted. We're going to keep preaching. We can't stop. Do what you want. Punish us, beat us, which they do.

We're going to keep preaching. And that's the context that when they said that, and the crowd is, of course, in an uproar again in verse 33.

When they heard this, they were furious but wanted to put them to death. We're going to kill them. Again, just like with Jesus and with Paul we'll see later, what they are doing here is against all Mosaic Jewish law, how you put people to death.

There is a whole process of how you, there was trials, there was witnesses, there was a pattern. You didn't just put people to death. But they were going to do that. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin.

This is the ruling council. And he ordered the men be put outside for a while. Then he addressed them. And look what he says. Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men.

[14 : 29] And then he calls on two examples of recently. Thaddeus, who claimed to be somebody, and about 400 men rallied to him. He was killed. His followers dispersed. It came to nothing. Verse 37, after him, Judas, the Galilean, appeared in days of census, led a band of people revolt.

He too was killed. All his followers were scattered. This is not the first action where people are claiming something new. Do you remember the recent two revolts and how they both petered out and the Romans put an end to them?

Therefore, look at his advice. Therefore, in the present case, I advise you, leave these men alone. Let them go. For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail.

But if it's from God, you will not be able to stop these men. You will only find yourselves fighting against God. You look at his very balanced and fairly compassionate approach.

Stop this. You can't kill these men. First of all, it's against the law. And secondly, if it's nothing, it will come to nothing. But if it's from God, you better be careful because you might be opposing God.

[15 : 44] Now, I want to tell you a little bit. Gamaliel was the premier, number one, rabbinic teacher in Judea at this time.

Even today, even today among Orthodox and the academia of Israel and so on, it is said, when Gamaliel, the elder, died, the light went out on Torah teaching.

Meaning he was the last of the great rabbinic rabbi teachers. He is well known in Judaism today. He is held up as the great teacher from this, the last great teacher from this rabbinic era.

He was the student and protege of a man named Hillel. And prior to the time of Christ, there were two Jewish theological camps, if you will, of the law, Shammai and Hillel.

Shammai was a very legalistic, very harsh. He was known for that. Hillel was very, more of the people's leader, kind of the pastor type person.

[16 : 55] He was known for his compassion and his generosity and his interpretation of the law, but yet it was always lent toward compassion and humility.

And there are great stories about Hillel. Gamaliel was his protege. He's the one who sat in Moses' seat now instead of Hillel.

That was Paul's teacher. That's who Paul grew up under. And, you know, Paul reflects on this as well in the book of Galatians.

I'll just read this to you. When Paul oftentimes refers back to his people, he says, for you have heard in chapter 1, verse 13, you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church.

I tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age. I was extremely zealous for the tradition of my fathers.

[17 : 59] Paul's telling you here, he may have been Gamaliel's top student. He may have been in line to inherit that seat of Hillel to Gamaliel to Saul of Tarsus.

You know, there's a book that I have. It was written back in the 40s, last century. As a Jewish author, I like, my father was Jewish.

My name, Shamari, is Jewish. And so I read a lot of Jewish history and literature and so forth. And I came across this book some years ago, years ago. It's called The Apostle. And it's a historical fiction.

You know, like today, some of the series we watch and so forth that are based on the facts of the Bible, but they add the conversation. And so it gets to be more real life when you're watching it type of thing, you know.

And he's written several books. He is a Jewish historian, scholar, author. And he wrote some very, very well-known literature back in, I think, the 40s of the last century and so forth.

[19:04] He wrote one on Jesus called the Nazarene. And he wrote some on the Old Testament characters. And he wrote some other ones as well. And he wrote a book on the Apostle Paul. And this is amazing.

Very good chance to read it. If you've ever come across it in a used bookstore, it's called The Apostle by Shalom Ash, A-S-C-H. He is so knowledgeable about first century Judaism that that's the value in this book.

He never, I always wondered, did he ever become a believer? I mean, he wrote a book about Jesus. He wrote a book about Paul. And I found a little teeny book about this big he wrote called One Destiny about how Judaism and Christianity, they're brothers.

We have the same roots. We have the same, but, he said, the one bridge I can't cross over is that Jesus was God. I can't do that, so no.

But in this book, I want to read this quote to you. He tells this account of Paul meeting Gamaliel while he's getting ready to go to Damascus.

[20:10] And Gamaliel says this to Saul. He says, Saul, I am afraid for thee, Saul of Tarsish. The path which thou has chosen for thyself is narrow and perilous.

The abyss lies on either side of it. Know that those who fall into it are never again lifted up. Thou hast sore need of help of heaven. I will pray for thee that God may open the sources of love in thy heart.

For on this narrow and perilous path of thy choosing, there is no light, no signs, no guideposts. The lights are darkened, measures confused, good and evil indistinguishable.

There's one thread for you to hold on to. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. That thread alone can guide thee back. Hold fast to it. It may yet save you.

It's interesting how his take on that because his protege, Hillel, was known for this statement, love your neighbor as yourself, which of course our Lord Jesus Christ clearly stated as well from the Old Testament his greatest commandment, love God, love your neighbor.

[21:18] I just read that to you if maybe you can kind of, you read about Gamaliel from chapter 5 of Acts. Yes, this man, his attitude was different. Paul has gone off in a different path.

He is a one man wrecking ball of the Christian church. In that passage I read to you in Galatians, Paul goes on to say this, that he said that I was intense.

I destroyed the church. I was advancing. I persecuted the church. He tells himself I imprisoned people. And this is what Paul says back in Acts 22.

He says, we go back to where we started. I am a Jew of Tarsus born in this city under Gamaliel. I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers. And I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.

I persecuted the followers of this way. You know, this is one of the times we see this idea, W-A-Y, is used to, as a Christian church. This is what they were called, followers of the way.

[22:23] I persecuted them to their death. I arrested both men and women, throwing them into prison. He also talks about, and earlier, he says, I caused them to blaspheme.

As the high priest, the high priest here, he can tell you, and all the council, they can obtain, I obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and I went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

Listen, Damascus, that's modern day Syria, it's still there, right? Damascus, that is no short trip from Judea across that desert-y area to Damascus.

But Paul, in his zealousness, he's going there to round up Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem and have them killed. You know, I think about when Paul traveled later on in his

missionary journeys, I wonder how many cities and places he went where he showed up, and someone said, oh yeah, that's the guy, that's the guy who was responsible for my father or mother's death, or my brother or sister.

I mean, he had people killed. He was in charge of Stephen's death. They laid the garments at his feet. And he says, I was zeal, but he's doing this, why?

[23 : 36] Because he's serving God, he thinks, right? He has not abandoned God or Judaism. He thinks he's doing what he's doing to preserve what God has given them.

He's doing this out of his love for God, his compassion, but as he says later on, I did this out of ignorance. I did this out of ignorance. But that's the background of Paul's conversion.

Verse 6, about noon, as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground, and I heard a voice say to me, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

Who are you, Lord? I asked. I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting. When it says that he fell to the ground, I suggest that light threw him to the ground.

What did he see? We see that the people around him saw the light, but they didn't hear any voices. Only Paul heard the voice. I think this light was the Shekinah glory from God. Remember when Moses came down from the Mount Sinai, and he had to put a cover over his face, and people couldn't stand the prophet Isaiah.

[24 : 52] When Isaiah chapter 6, in the year the king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated in his majesty. I saw his glory, and I fell down and said, I am a dead man, because he saw God's actual glory.

I think this is the Shekinah glory of God that is shined down on Paul. It's not just the sunlight. It's not just a bright light. It throws him to the ground. It's desperate.

This is catastrophic. Talk about remembering catastrophic days, because he hears this voice. It would be interesting to know what tenor was this voice?

Was it accusing Saul? Why are you doing this to me? Was it compassionate Saul? Why are you persecuting me? We don't know what the tenor is. But it's such that there's obviously something heavenly about this, that Paul says, who are you, Lord?

Who are you? And Jesus says, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting. Can you imagine for a minute what went through Saul's mind at this point?

[26 : 02] I mean, according to a lot of other stories in the Bible, what could he have expected? I mean, from a human perspective, I would imagine one thing he thought of is, woe is me, I am dead.

Why wouldn't he be? Why wouldn't God strike him dead for what he's doing? He is killing Christians. He is persecuting the church. He's trying to destroy the church. Why wouldn't God kill him?

I wonder if he's just frozen in terror. And what do I do now? Who are you? And he says, my companions, they saw the light, but they did not understand the voice.

And look at what Paul says. Lord, what shall I do? What do I do? I just think of Isaiah. Woe is me. I am dead.

My eyes have seen the glory of God. I live amongst a people of unclean lips. Paul says, what do I do? What shall I do, Lord? It could have been catastrophic.

[27 : 04] It should have been the end of Saul from a human perspective. But the voice says, get up. The Lord said, go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.

The question is, when did Paul actually receive Christ as his Savior? When did he actually believe? You know, and we know from Acts chapter 9, we aren't told this here, but God had come to Ananias in a dream of the Lord Jesus Christ and told him, hey, Saul of Tarsus is coming.

And Ananias says, yeah, I know Saul of Tarsus. He's been killing people. We know who he is. You sure about this, Lord? Right? And God says, he is my chosen instrument. And you know what he tells him?

I must show him all things he must suffer for the gospel. That's interesting. He doesn't say, I'm going to show him all the ways he's going to be successful and the crowds are going to come. I'm going to show him all the ways he must suffer for my gospel and for the ministry I have him.

The Lord said to Paul, Saul, incidentally, his name is changed from Saul to Paul. It's really more of a matter of his Hebrew name and his Greek equivalent name.

[28:15] And so, that's really the biggest change as he goes into his ministry in the Gentile world. He goes by Paul. My companions blinded, right?

He's still blinded. They led me by hand into Damascus because of the brilliance of the light had blinded me. Verse 12, a man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer.

Notice this. He is the man that Jesus came to and said, I'm sending Saul to you. He was part of the Christian household, I assume, but it also says he was a devout observer of the law, highly regarded by all the Jews living there, the Jewish community in all these cities.

He stood beside me and said, Brother Saul, receive your sight. at that moment, I was able to see him. And then he said to me, the God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will.

Notice this. He has chosen you to know his will and to see the righteous one and to hear words from his mouth. This is a reference to what he saw on the road to Damascus.

[29:21] It was a Shekinah glory in 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul lists all the people who have seen the resurrected Lord, right? 500 at once. Finally is me born out of one that is of due time. He saw him on the road to Damascus in his glory.

He says, You've seen him. You've heard him. And you will be a witness to all men what you have seen and heard and now get up. Wash your sin in what you're doing.

Get baptized. This was part of the Jewish purification water cleansing process as John the Baptist did to show that. It was part of that culture that was embedded in them.

They still have any Jewish synagogue today. There are still McVeighs they use for purification purposes and call on his name. So Paul's recounting his story.

Remember now, he's talking to this Jewish audience. He's talking to the leaders of Israel and all the people that wanted to kill him and they're obviously they're fixed on him.

[30:19] They're listening. They aren't yelling. They're not screaming. They're not trying to kill him. They're listening to his story. And then he says, I returned to Jerusalem. I was praying at the temple. I fell into a trance and I saw the Lord speaking.

Quick, leave Jerusalem. Immediately, they will not accept your testimony about me. And then Paul goes on to say, Lord, I replied to the Lord. I said, he's telling his story now.

When he left Jerusalem, these men know I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believed in your name. The blood of your martyr Stephen was shed on. I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.

He's telling this now. He's still telling this story to the Jewish leaders. And then he tells them, the Lord said to me, go, I will send you far away to the Gentiles.

This was my commission. I am sending you far away to the Gentiles. And notice the next thing it says. The crowd listened to Paul until he said this.

[31:21] That's a reference back to what he just said. The minute he said, I am being sent away to the Gentiles, that was it. The place erupted.

And look what they said. They said, we've heard enough. They raised their voices and shouted, rid the earth of him. He is not fit to live. And they throw in their clothes and cloaks and the commander takes them.

And once again, he responds to them in verse 26. By the way, I'm a Roman citizen. And they stop. They were going to punish him. But do you notice that?

That he tells this whole account of his amazing conversion. He talks about Gamaliel. He talks about his background. He talks about his seeing God, the glory of God and everything.

He talks about Ananias, who was well respected by the Jews in Damascus. The minute he says, I was sent by Christ to the Gentiles.

[32:20] That's it. Place erupts. You know, the same thing actually happens in the next time he tells us a story in chapter 26. We'll just look at one verse here. In chapter 26, we have the same thing.

This time he's, this time he is speaking to Festus and Agrippa, the Roman governors. They wanted to hear his story. And he's telling, Agrippa comes from the Herod family who were part Jews.

It's a whole long story. They really weren't practicing Jews, but they considered, remember Herod considered himself the king of the Jews? So he knew the Bible. And he's the same thing. Notice that verse 23, he says in verse, in verse 22, at the end of it, I'm saying nothing beyond what the prophets of Moses said would have happened, that the Christ would suffer as the first to rise from the dead, proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.

At this point, the minute he said that, and to the Gentiles, what does Festus say? Paul, you are out of your mind. I think the King James said, much learning hath made thee mad.

He says, Paul, you are crazy. Your learning is driving you crazy. What are you talking about going to the Gentiles? Well, listen, Paul's ministry was to the Gentile world.

[33 : 42] It was to Israel, the kings and nations, and the Gentiles. Every place he went, he went first to the synagogue. Why? Because in the synagogue, he had a heart for his own people. He had common ground.

They believed in the one true God. They believed in the Old Testament scriptures. And there were Gentiles there, the God-fearers, who were attracted to Judaism. They were sitting, and they were welcome to come.

If you wanted to go to the synagogue, you'd be welcome to come. They were welcome to come. But most of the time, he was thrown out, right? But Paul was sent to the Gentile world.

And I don't know that we could ever fully appreciate this chasm. I mean, these Jewish people, these ones that are Christians in Jerusalem who are zealous for the law, they have spent their entire life following the Mosaic law.

It's not easy. It costs a lot. But they did it because they were, they thought what they were doing was, and it was at the time, was right. It was what God asked them to do.

[34 : 48] They were told to do this. And the sacrifices, and they were looking forward to the Messiah. And this is what they were supposed to do. And now, all of a sudden, you're going to take this message of our Messiah, Messiah, and they were marriage of Christian Jews who believed in Christ.

But you're going to take this message to the pagans, to the Gentiles? I mean, you know, you think, we think we live in a rough, a tough culture today, right, of Christian values.

This culture, I mean, these people, they practiced, they practiced prostitution as part of their worship is how evil it was. I mean, it was just heinous.

And you mean, these pagans who have been practicing this kind of life all of a sudden can just accept Jesus and we're the same? They don't have to at least get circumcised.

They don't have to at least keep the law. They don't have to at least eat the right kind of food. I mean, there is this huge chasm. And listen, you think that was easy for Paul coming from his background to all of a sudden be asked to go and walk into a Gentile context that are unclean.

[36 : 07] They're pagans. They're Gentiles. You remember Peter when the Lord asked Peter to go to Cornelius' house? What did it take? Three times that vision of the unclean animals coming down and what Peter's saying, no, Lord, I've never eaten.

I'm not going to do that. Finally, God says, Peter, if I say it's clean, it's clean. And Peter went to Cornelius' house and he came back to Jerusalem and the people couldn't believe it.

You did what? This is Peter after the resurrection. So I just want you to just get a little taste, a little flavor for what Paul is asked to do and there's no wonder.

When he said, the Messiah, our Messiah, our Jewish Messiah, who we believe, he's asked me to go to the Gentile world and they said, that's it, we've heard enough. He doesn't deserve to live.

That was Paul's calling. He was called to the Gentile world. And you know, as we wrap up, what about this, what is it in this lesson that's meaningful for me and for you?

[37 : 13] When I think about this, I just, I want to give you just a little bit of just appreciation and taste. I just hope you think about this. what a challenge this was for Paul to, it was not easy for him.

And you read in 2 Corinthians, when Paul talks about his life and his ministry, he talks about being beat, being stoned, being whipped by his own people, by the Gentiles, being shep-wrecked, suffering in every manner, being stoned and left for dead.

And all the things he went through for his faithfulness to God's word. But he was faithful and he went to the Gentile world and it cost him because his message was simply this.

In Galatians chapter 3, the Apostle Paul says this, verse 26, you are all sons of God through faith in Christ. And this is in the midst of Galatia of this huge controversy.

This is where Paul recounts the fact he's telling the people in Galatians, you know, when Peter came, I had to face him down, face to face in front of everybody and says, Peter, quit pulling back from the Gentiles, right?

[38 : 24] In Galatians, he says that. I told Peter to his face, you can't do this. It was still this huge controversy in the Christian church over this Gentile ministry. But Paul says this, all of you who

were baptized into Christ, in 1 Corinthians 12, he says we were baptized by one, we were baptized means placed into, we were placed into Christ by one spirit, spiritual baptism.

We were placed into Jesus Christ by one spirit. And you have clothed yourself with Christ. Look what he says. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female.

You are all one in Christ. Listen, friends, I don't think there's any way that you and I can fully appreciate how radical this was.

Starting off, first of all, with ethnicity, Jew or Gentile. We are equal when we accept Christ. We are equal. We come together. Jews and Gentiles, we come.

We're in the church. We're in the body of Christ. We worship together. We serve. We are one. This is in the midst of Paul reminding him, I had to tell Peter, quit doing this. Quit pulling back from the Gentiles.

[39:41] You can't do this anymore. It's an ongoing issue. Paul says, no. And it's the same today. There is no ethnicity in the body of Christ. There is no racial division in the body of Christ.

He says there is neither slave nor free. We think up to about a third of the population in the Roman world were some kind of slaves or servants.

I mean, it was just everywhere. Some of it were ones you agreed to. Some were war slaves. Some were sold as slaves. But can you imagine coming in the body of Christ, coming to worship, and what if the slave is now gifted as a teacher and he's sitting next to a slave owner in the church and he's going to be doing the preaching or teaching?

How does that work in the Roman world? It's radical. Male nor female. In a very patriarchal society, think of some of the Islamic countries today where women, we see again now in Afghanistan where they went completely back on what they promised, right?

And girls can't go to school. Girls can't work. Girls, you know, they're subjected. I mean, this is the world. And Paul says, no. There's neither Jew.

[40:53] There's no ethnicity. There's no social or financial status. And there is no gender status. We are all one in Christ.

This was Paul's calling. It was radical. It was novel. It's the body of Christ. And Paul suffered greatly.

But you know what? Paul was encountered the Lord Jesus Christ. And he said, Lord, who are you? I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

And his response is, what do I do? And you know, he went to Ananias and Ananias told him what he was going to do.

It included being sent to the Gentile world. It included going against everything that Paul could have ever imagined in his life. But he said yes. He did it.

[41:52] He did it. And you know, he tells us this in 1 Timothy 1. Paul says to Timothy, young pastor, he says, Timothy, I thank Christ Jesus, our Lord, who has given me strength that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his ministry, to his service.

Look what it says. even though I was once a blasphemer, he recognizes, I was blaspheming. I was a persecutor. I was a violent man.

But he was everything that Gamaliel wasn't. And he says, but I was shown mercy. I acted in ignorance and unbelief.

The grace of our Lord was poured out onto me abundantly along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying, Timothy, don't forget this.

Remember this. It deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst.

[43:02] King James says, I am the chief. Meaning I'm first in line. This is no mean statement. This is no small statement. This is an honest appraisal of himself.

Why? But for that very reason, I would show mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

Now to the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and evermore. He was told, and he says, God set me aside at my birth.

I didn't know it. He called me to this ministry. I accepted it. And there was a reason. It all, it was horrible. Paul says, it was horrible what I did.

But you know what? The reason for it is I became an example that there is nobody, nobody who has ever lived who can say, I am beyond hope.

[44 : 06] I am too sinful. I cannot receive God's mercy. Paul says, that's the reason. If I could receive it and I was given it, it is for everyone.

And I ask you today as we wrap this up, I asked you earlier, we talked about where were you on 9-11? Where were you when you were saved? When did you put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as your savior?

I remember when I did, I was in third grade, camp, Gilead, flannel graph story, and I received Christ as my savior. Others don't receive Christ so young they don't remember exactly the pinpoint the day or time.

I think my kids and my kids are like that. But you know the significant events that took place that you reconfirmed it. You say, yes, I know I've accepted Christ and I commit to this.

What is your story? Where were you? And let me ask you this. I'll ask myself this. What would my life be like?

[45 : 14] How different might your life be if it weren't for the grace of God? Where would you be today? What decisions might you have made? If it wasn't for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, where would we be?

Paul says, I am a trophy of God's grace. And we, every one of us is. Are. Every one of us are a trophy of God's grace. Every single one of us are trophies of God's amazing grace.

And I ask you this. How about we ask this question? What shall I do? What shall I do? What shall I do with this amazing grace that God has poured out on my life and invested in me?

I look back at how much God has done for me and for my family, my kids, my grandkids, and my, you know, what should we do? What should we do?

I think we should do what Paul did and say, I'll do what you ask me to do. I don't know what God's asked you to do. And it's different for you and different for me and different for you and different for you.

[46 : 23] But what does God ask you to do? Are you faithful? And will you do it? And also, will we do what the Apostle Paul did? In this age we live in where we know, I don't need to tell you, we hear it all the time.

It's an era of so much divisiveness. I've never seen in my lifetime that, how many people I've come across, families, friends, who say, I won't ever talk to that person again because of their politics.

I won't ever have anything to do with that person because of this, because of what they believe, what they do. And we know we live in a divisive time. We all get that. But listen, friends, the gospel of Jesus Christ goes beyond all that.

What matters more, their views or their eternal salvation? What matters more? And friends, just like the Apostle Paul, and it was hard, if I were to ask you, who is the least and last person that you would see yourself ever coming alongside and befriending, showing Christian love, sharing the gospel?

I'll tell you who it was for Paul. It was Gentiles, the pagans. And I have to, let's ask ourselves, are we willing, are we willing to set aside everything else when it comes to a person's eternal state?

[47 : 49] We are called to go to everyone and anyone as Paul was with a wonderful message of the grace of God and come alongside and show them our love and compassion.

What shall I do, Lord? Who are you? And what shall I do? Father, we thank you for your word.

Thank you for the life of the apostles, all of them, Lord. Every one of those apostles were martyred, were killed, many violently for their witness and faith for you and they were faithful and they did what you called them to do.

And Father, I just pray that you would enable us to be found faithful and that we would be thankful and that every one of us would every so often just pause and remember our own story that makes sure our families know our story and remember how gracious you have been to us, how compassionate, forgiving, how unworthy we are of your love but you chose to love us and for that we give you thanks today.

In Christ's name, Amen. Amen.