

Conversions 6

Proconsul / Lydia

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Acts 13:6-7

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6 When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, **7** who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence.

As we have been looking at some of the conversions here in the book of Acts we have been using three areas to help us understand them better...

4

- 1) The Opportunity
- 2) The Character of the Convert (s)
- 3) The Nature of the Message

We have seen a variety of circumstances which dictated opportunities, we have seen many different characters of those that have been converted, the one constant in these conversions has been the message. Jesus Christ is the message, who He was, what He was, what He did, what He taught, now, the message changed a little with each of the different opportunities and types of character, but the message doesn't vary. It can't. John writes in...

1 John 2:12

5

12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake.

There is only one message of truth and that is that Jesus Christ is the source, the only source, of salvation for man. What we have seen in the conversions is that the impact of the message varies a little based upon the need of the convert.

In this account Barnabas and Saul have travelled to Salamis on the Isle of Cyprus. There they encounter a magician by the name of Bar-Jesus, which means ...

6

Son of Jesus or in the Hebrew Joshua

This false prophet, the magician Elymas, as his name is translated into Greek, was opposing them and their teaching. Elymas is said to be with the Roman pro-consul, Sergius Paulus, who is described as an intelligent man. The pro-consul calls Barnabas and Saul in to hear more about what they are teaching and Elymas is opposing them the whole time. This is...

7

- 1) The Opportunity

Sergius has an interest in what Saul and Barnabas are teaching, the Gospel. He wants to hear more about it and calls them into him and it appears that he is believing what he is hearing. Elymas is speaking against it and presents a golden opportunity for Saul and Barnabas...

Acts 13:9-11

8

9 But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, **10** and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? **11** Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time." And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand.

Saul, now Paul, is filled with the Holy Ghost and tells Elymas that his days of opposing Christ have come to an end, and he strikes him blind. That is the opportunity, but now we come to our next thought in this series concerning the pro-consul...

9 2) The Character of the Convert (s)

This account is so short it's a little difficult to surmise too much about Sergius Paulus, but there are some things that are readily apparent. We know that he is a part of the Roman hierarchy; a pro-consul is thought to be the highest ranking local authority. This isn't a position easily achieved; it was often a reward to someone who had done something for the Rome, or possibly for someone from the military who had achieved a victory. Regardless of how he might have gotten there, the fact that Sergius Paulus is the pro-consul of Salamis speaks to a certain standing in the Roman government. This speaks to his character, but probably a more important statement about him is the fact that he truly showed an interest in what Paul and Barnabas were teaching. Sergius was so interested that he sent for them to hear what they had to say. This is where it gets interesting. Note what the scriptures say...

Acts 13:7-8 **10**

Bar-Jesus, **7** who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. **8** But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

It is very apparent that the pro-consul if not having already been convicted to faith was rapidly approaching it. That's what Elymas was opposing. Not just what was being taught, but the faith that the teaching was promoting. The character of the pro-consul is seen in his burgeoning faith and the culmination, if you will, to his faith is when he sees the power of the Spirit working through Paul when he strikes Elymas blind for a time.

Acts 13:12 **11**

12 Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.

We aren't told if the pro-consul acted on his faith and was baptized as we have seen in the other conversions, but we are told he believed. This is an indication of the...

12 3) The Nature of the Message

Remember faith comes from hearing the Word of God. If Sergius Paulus developed faith, it had to have come from the teaching of the Word of God. The Gospel is the power of God to lead man to and to effect salvation through Jesus Christ. That is the message.

Acts 16:14

13

14 A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

Lydia is spoken of as being the first European convert. *(See Map)* She is said to be a worshipper of God. There are two ways to understand this statement...

- 14** A) She worshipped God under the Patriarchal Law ala Cornelius
B) She was a proselyte to the Law of Moses

Most commentators say that she was a proselyte. Here is...

- 15** 1) The Opportunity

As with the Ethiopian Eunuch and Cornelius, Lydia had come to God on her own. She had searched and found Him the only way that man can find God, through His Law. This is also the next point in our discussion...

- 16** 2) The Character of the Convert (s)

The proof of spiritual character is seen in the response to God's Law.

Matt 7:15-20

17

15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. **16** You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? **17** So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. **18** A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. **19** Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **20** So then, you will know them by their fruits.

What does it mean to be spiritual or to have a spiritual character? Christ says that good trees, read spiritual character, bear good fruit. Lydia began bearing good fruit when she decided to seek God and a relationship with Him through His Law, the proof of a spiritual character. This is also seen in her response...

Acts 16:14

18

14 and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

Here then is...

- 19** 3) The Nature of the Message

There is a point that needs to be made here. Many people come to a misunderstanding of what is being said...

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"The Lord opened her heart"

What does this mean? Did the Lord miraculously cause Lydia to accept and believe what Paul was teaching, the Gospel of Jesus Christ? I can't accept that. If that were the case, then we would have to accept that there are people that the Lord favors more than others.

Acts 10:34-35

21

34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, **35** but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.

God does not miraculously give one person faith to believe in the Word but not everyone. That's not how God works. That said, what does it mean. Note as a reference to this idea...

Ex 4:21

22

21 The Lord said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.

Again, are we to understand that what this passage is saying is that God caused Pharaoh to sin, because that is exactly what must be accepted if that is what we understand. That is no more than case than God miraculously causing people to believe, that is what Peter means when he says...

23

35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.

So, we have noted what this doesn't mean, but what does it mean? I'll give you a thought that, at least to me, answers this. God's Word is a powerful tool...

Heb 4:12

24

12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The writer here answers the questions of how did God harden the heart of Pharaoh or open the heart of Lydia. God's Word demands a response, it cannot be avoided. It is a living, active entity that must be responded to. For some, Lydia, Cornelius, the Eunuch, it moved them to open their hearts and minds to accept and believe it. For others, Pharaoh, Elymas it caused them to have hard hearts and reject it's teaching. Pharaoh was told...

25

"Let my people go"

That was the Word of God given to him and it demanded a choice from him. It could have opened his heart and he could have obeyed, but rather it hardened his heart and he chose to disobey. The hardening and or opening of a man's heart depends on how he chooses to respond to God's Word, but make no mistake, His Word will get a response, either for it or against it. And here is the point, there is no middle ground. Pharaoh could not have just ignored God's imperative, he had to respond. Every man who has ever lived, is living now, or ever will live will, whether they want to or not, will choose to accept or deny the Word of God, Jesus Christ, in their lives. They may think that they can just ignore God, Christ, the Word but the truth is, a day is coming when Christ will be revealed and every knee will bow.

While we have been looking at some of the conversions in the book of Acts, what I also wanted us to see were the points, thoughts, that we have been looking at.

26

1) The Opportunity

What is our opportunity? Are we like Lydia and Cornelius and the Eunuch? Do we have such a strong desire to worship God that we seek out a way to worship Him. Have we set a pattern of rejection like the Jews at Pentecost or Saul had and we now see the error of our decisions? Do we have such a strong desire to be a child of God, like the Samaritans, that the message that promises that relationship intrigues and invites us? What is our opportunity?

That, very often, is dependent upon...

27 2) The Character of the Convert (s)

What we do with the Gospel is entirely up to us. Our character determines whether the Word opens our hearts or causes them to harden.

James 1:17-18 **28**

17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. **18** In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

There is the last of our thoughts in conversion...

29 3) The Nature of the Message

Last week Mike brought us three great lessons and in one of those he talked about

Rom 12:2 **30**

2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Paul is talking about exactly our point. The world is a mold, and when we pattern ourselves after the things of this world, we conform or mold ourselves to it, but when we reject the world and the things of this world then we transform, or change ourselves from what we are, a creature of this world into something entirely different, a creature of God. That is what the Word of God can do if we will just let it.

1 Thess 2:13 **31**

13 For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

That is the message, Christ is the nature of the message. The message hasn't changed for over 2,000 years. It is the one constant in the equation of conversion. When the power of the Gospel strikes a good and honest heart then the fruit of the opportunity springs forth and like Lydia and her household...

Acts 16:15 **32**

15 And when she and her household had been baptized,