

Introduction:

1. The book of Acts shows how people became Christians. While we might be familiar with many of the cases of conversion in that book, we may have failed to see how unusual some of those cases are!
2. Our study begins in Acts 8. The Jerusalem saints were forced from their city. There was a wide-spread persecution, Acts 8:1, 4. In spite of this, the disciples continued to preach. And they will meet some unusual people along the way. The gospel is going to go beyond just the ordinary Jerusalem Jew.
3. What follows in Acts 8-10 is remarkable. But are we so familiar with these conversions that we fail to see their radical nature? What did they mean to the early church, and to us today?

The Lesson:**I. Five unusual cases of conversion.****A. The first case is that of the Samaritans.**

1. One of those forced from Jerusalem was Philip. The story begins with this man Acts 8:5-12. At this point you see the great commission of Jesus in action, Mark 16:15-16. These people heard the gospel, believed it and were baptized.
2. Now, someone might say, "There is nothing unusual about this."
 - a. But to appreciate what happens here, you need some background on these people.
 - b. Samaria was a troubled city. It had been for a long time. Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom—a kingdom that fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC.
 - c. Most of the people were taken captive. The Assyrians moved foreigners into the land. And, in process of time, the Jews who remained in the region of Samaria intermarried with those foreigners. The Jews of Jerusalem despised the Samaritans and regarded them as half breeds. This explains the statement in John 4:9. The Samaritans had a corrupt worship, followed a corrupt law, and were despised by the Jews.
3. But, suddenly they are accepted by God through the gospel! And, if they are accepted by God, they must also be accepted by other Christians. And they were, Acts 8:14. It is hard for us to see the magnitude of this great event. This disrupted the old religious order!

B. The second case again finds us at Samaria—the case of Simon the Sorcerer.

1. We noted him briefly in our earlier reading, Acts 8:9-11. This man—a faker, a fraud—pretended to be something great. He was a false teacher who claimed supernatural abilities.
2. Today we are sure that false teachers can never be converted. But we are wrong in what we are so sure of. This man was converted, just like other Samaritans, Acts 8:13. And, while he had issues later, we do not discount his conversion or the power of the gospel!

C. Our third case finds us later in the same chapter—the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch.

1. This man was returning from worship in Jerusalem. He has been reading Isaiah 53, but doesn't understand what he is reading. Philip catches up to him and inquires, Acts 8:30-39.

2. While we might think this case to be rather ordinary, there is something unique about this man. It wasn't that he was from Ethiopia, or that he was a treasurer, but that he was a eunuch. The law put prohibitions on the rights of such a man, Deuteronomy 23:1. But this man would come into the kingdom with full rights! This might have shocked some folks!
- D. Our fourth case is that of Saul of Tarsus.
1. If there is one man the early Christians would never have thought to be a prospect, it is this persecutor of Christians, Acts 9:1-2. Maybe God sees potential when we don't!
 2. This man was not only converted, he became a great worker, Acts 22:16; 26:16-18.
- E. Our fifth and final case is that of Cornelius the Gentile.
1. Cornelius was a Gentile. He wasn't Jewish like those Peter preached to in Acts 2. He wasn't even half Jewish like the Samaritans that Philip preached to in Acts 8. He would have been regarded by the Jews as pure heathen. The Jews, historically, avoided such a man.
 2. But God had plans for him, Acts 10:1-2. It was not in Peter's plan to preach to him, Acts 10: 28-29. Peter had no right to resist his conversion, Acts 10:47-48. But Peter was called to give account for this! Acts 11:1-3. The conclusion is found in Acts 11:18. In fact, in each of these five accounts of unusual conversions, there are conclusions to be drawn.

II. What do we conclude from these cases? What does God want us to learn?

- A. We learn some important lessons about God.
1. God loves everyone—the Jews, Samaritans, even the Gentiles, John 3:16; Romans 5:8.
 2. God extends His grace and mercy to everyone—no matter their background, Titus 2:11.
- B. We learn some important lessons about the gospel.
1. We have a powerful gospel that changes people's lives. See Acts 9:13-4; Romans 1:16.
 2. The gospel is powerful today. We have to be like Ananias, with courage to speak, Acts 9:15.
- C. We learn some important lessons about ourselves.
1. We learn that for folks to be saved, they need to hear from us, from God's people, Acts 8:4.
 2. God could have converted any of these in any way He wanted—could have used angels, etc. But, in every case, He used His people to proclaim the gospel. We are His people.
 3. We learn that God wants us to tell the gospel, even to the lowly regarded (like the Samaritans), to false teachers (like Simon), to outcasts (like the Eunuch), to persecutors (like Saul of Tarsus), to the excluded (like the Gentile Cornelius)—people different from ourselves!
 4. All five of these conversions involve the kinds of folks we might tend to leave out. But God wanted them saved. The only way people like these today can be saved is by hearing the gospel. And if they are to hear it, they are going to have to hear it from us.

Conclusion:

1. These cases should motivate us to tell people—to tell everyone we can about the Lord Jesus.
2. These cases opened the door of salvation—to all men. Even to you and me. Let us tell others.

3. One message to take to heart today is that you can be saved—whatever you are.