

V.O.C. November 2019

November 24, 2019: Jesus moves into the world

Dear Listeners,

This month the messages of the Voice of the Church have focussed your attention on the book of Acts, the acts of the apostles. What we have seen as well, though, is the fact that behind the acts of the apostles we see that the Lord Jesus continued His work, that He gathers His church by the preaching of the gospel, and that He protects and defends His church. Jesus Himself keeps the reins in hand when the gospel is going into the world! Then He had to work on both by His Holy Spirit, on the hearts of the disciples and on the hearts of the Gentiles in the world!

Jesus works with His Holy Spirit on the hearts of the apostles, of Peter for instance. When Peter is called and invited to come to the house of a Roman centurion, he is very hesitant. Enter into the house of a heathen ruler, an unclean man? Peter has to learn that times have changed and that for the Lord there is no more clean or unclean; either in kinds of food or with regard to people. Cornelius, a Roman centurion, is a God-fearing man who had come to know the God of Israel and who had accepted the special relationship between the LORD and His people Israel. Yet, he feared the LORD and he loved God's people. Although he was not allowed to enter the temple, he also served and worshipped the LORD from a distance, respectfully, humbly. This Cornelius also wants to know Jesus and the Lord Jesus wants to make this devout and humble believer of God into one of His disciples! That's why He brings Peter into his house!

After the Holy Spirit had come and worked in Peter's heart and brought him into the house of Cornelius, Peter shares his personal struggle and experience with the people gathered in Cornelius' house. Then he also came to realize that throughout the Old Testament the LORD had revealed His will for this world: all the nations will be blessed with the offspring of Abraham. At His ascension, the Lord Jesus had commanded the apostles as well: Go, make all nations my disciples, baptizing them, teaching them! That's what Peter is called to do and here he does indeed! Another such amazing work on one of the LORD's people is the conversion and calling of Paul. In that too, Jesus shows that He holds the reins of the church, and that He calls whom He wills. The choices that He makes are totally different from the way people do. That's what showed at this time of the early church; it still shows the same today! That's how the Lord Jesus calls you too, dear listeners, and you will be amazed later on of the tremendous grace He bestows!

There was this Pharisee Saul, a very knowledgeable man in the Scriptures, knowing the Law of Moses inside and out! He approved of the persecutions, the execution of Stephen, and he was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. While he was breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, he went even so far as to find them in Damascus! On his way there the Lord Jesus stopped him in his track, and said to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" That's important to note: why are you persecuting *me*? Everyone who resists the Holy Spirit, opposes the church, is doing so against Jesus! Well, this Saul was just like his name sake, Saul the king who pursued David, persecuting Jesus, the son of

David. And just like David continued to show love to King Saul and protected him, so we hear the Lord Jesus speak with love and grace to this Saul, personally! Thus, the Lord Jesus brings Saul to a complete conversion, which is His amazing grace for a wretch like him! Jesus puts Saul in the light of the gospel, showing him the fulfilment of the gospel, and then calls him to bring this gospel to the heathen!

Indeed, some time later Saul, who changed his name to Paul, together with a fellow-believer, Barnabas, set out to bring the gospel to the nations. Then their approach is the same as the Lord Jesus' approach had been: first go to the Jews. Paul and Barnabas also go to the place where they can find Jews in every city; in the synagogues. They know, just as God had been gracious to them so they may show the LORD's love and grace and faithfulness to the Jews. And just as it happened with the Lord Jesus who went to the Jews and called them to Himself as their Saviour and Messiah, and was persecuted and crucified by them, so Paul and Barnabas went to the Jews even though they were the ones who resisted and opposed them most!

The Holy Spirit of Jesus instills the same in the hearts of believers today as well: we reach out to those who have heard and known and believed the gospel before but have strayed, before we go beyond them. Perhaps that applies to you as well, dear listener, that this message reminds you of what you had in the gospel of salvation and in Jesus when you grew up! Then see the love of God in this message of outreach, see His grace and faithfulness toward you, and repent and return! Then it may be so that you had bad experiences in the church before, or you may have been hurt by church people before, yet then you are reminded that for a strong faith and a deep love for the Lord Jesus you need the church, you need the gospel as it is proclaimed in the church through the Spirit!

This message, however, dear listeners, is not only for those who have known the Lord Jesus and who may have been born and raised in the church which they have left some time ago. It's a message for everyone! This gospel message about the love and grace of Jesus Christ is for you too who, just as Paul proclaimed to the heathen of his days, have seen the goodness of God in your life. That's what Paul held up to his audience: for centuries God has looked after the heathen nations, providing food and drink, the joy of life. Then the apostle Paul shows them as well what goodness and grace, what love and salvation this good God has shown to this world: He so loved this world that He gave His only Son that whosoever would believe in Him will not perish in his sins and under God's wrath but have eternal life! That's the message that's still going out from the church, also here on the Voice of the Church! It's a message that changes your life, your hope, your future tremendously and totally! It reunites you with God!

Then we see it in the life of Paul and Barnabas, in the life of every believer really, dear listeners, that the Holy Spirit changes us in the image of the Lord Jesus, it changes us in our approach to life, to our priorities, our decision-making! That's what Paul and Barnabas experienced as they were seeking to proceed in their work, wondering what the Lord wanted them to do; and that's what we may do today, praying that God would show us the way and that the Lord Jesus would lead us in the way by His Spirit and Word!