

Book of Acts Study, Part 53 – Wednesday, February 10, 2021 (COVID 19 Livestream #47)

The Book of Acts fills in between the Gospel of John and the Book of Romans.

Not only in the order in which the Books of the Bible are listed, but chronologically.

So the Book of Acts is very important, it fills in important history of the propagation of the early church. It documents the spread of the Gospel into the Gentile world.

Last week, we looked at the setting of the Book of Acts. We looked at the author Luke, and learned a little about him. But we also established the themes for the Book of Acts that we will be rallying around for our church, at such a time as this.

Two main themes of the Book of Acts we will be emphasizing:

- 1. Humanly speaking, the early Christians had nothing going for them. The church was new, with unproven leaders. They weren't educated, they had no money, no modern means for spreading the gospel. They faced incredible opposition and enormous obstacles. Yet they were empowered by the Holy Spirit to do the impossible and bring a simple salvation message to an unsaved world. *If this isn't encouraging for us here at Crossover, I don't know what is. God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called. What is going to happen here at Crossover will be a clear work of the Holy Spirit and it will be done through common broken people, amen?!***
- 2. Persecution was meant to squash Christianity. But God took the very act of persecution and used it to spread the Gospel like wildfire. Another name for the Book of Acts could be "The Unstoppable Church". *Each of us has a past. The enemy wants to use it against us to discourage us, to disqualify us, to rob us of our hope. But God does the opposite...He takes the very things Satan uses to destroy us and uses them for good. Out of our greatest hurts can come our greatest ministry, amen?!***

We now move into Chapter 9 and the story of the conversion of Saul/Paul. This will prove to be not only a miracle, but a pivotal turning point in the proliferation of the early church. Last time, commissioning of Saul.

Tonight, we'll finish chapter 12:

Acts 12:19-25

Herod's Death

Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. ²⁰ He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply.

OK, a little about Herod. King Herod is a classic example of the difference between religion and relationship. He was a Jewish king – ruling over the nation set apart for God. But it was more of a political affiliation than a kingship based on a relationship with God. He was more interested in advancing his political power and preserving his place with the Romans. He got along well with the two Roman emperors who ruled during his times as king of Israel. The Jews revered Jerusalem in Judea as their capital city. However, the Romans used Caesarea as their main center of commerce and rule in that province. This explains why Herod left Judea for Caesarea, and it shows you what his priorities were.

Herod came from a line of Herod's with the same priorities. His grandfather, Herod the Great, murdered the Jewish boys in Bethlehem when he heard about Jesus. His uncle, Herod Antipas, was the one who had John the Baptist murdered and was involved in Jesus' trial. And now, this third Herod in tonight's story, seems to follow in the evil line of Herod's. He is quite full of himself, as we will see shortly.

²¹ On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. ²² They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." ²³ Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

You can't make this stuff up. Can you imagine that scene? Herod, full of himself, sitting on his throne in a lavish robe, pontificating. He sure had the people mesmerized. They said he spoke like a god. He must've eaten that up.

What a scene. Well, God wasn't having any of it, was He?

Did you know that *God won't share His glory.*

Remember...this is the king of Israel, the nation set apart for God.

Everything was supposed to be about God and His majesty.

Yet, Herod allowed himself to be worshipped and didn't give God the praise.

Did you know the Bible has a lot to say about pride? And each of these seem to play out in the story of Herod.

The first one that comes to mind:

Proverbs 16:18

*¹⁸ Pride goes before destruction,
a haughty spirit before a fall.*

But the proverbs are full of other thoughts on pride:

Proverbs 11:2

*² When pride comes, then comes disgrace,
but with humility comes wisdom.*

Proverbs 13:10

*¹⁰ Where there is strife, there is pride,
but wisdom is found in those who take advice.*

Proverbs 14:3

*³ A fool's mouth lashes out with pride,
but the lips of the wise protect them.*

Psalm 10:4

*⁴ In his pride the wicked man does not seek him;
in all his thoughts there is no room for God.*

What a picture of the world we live in now.

Guys, we must remember this, and take heart when it seems the culture is getting away its arrogance and obstinance toward anything having to do with God...

God will not let pride go unpunished.

(just ask Herod)

Historian Josephus said he spent 5 days in an agonizing death being eaten alive by worms.

"Now when Agrippa had reigned three years over all Judea he came to the city Caesarea, which was formerly called Strato's Tower; and there he exhibited spectacles in honor of Caesar. At this festival a great number were gathered together of the principal persons of dignity of his province. On the second day of the spectacles he put on a garment made wholly of silver, of a truly wonderful texture, and came into the theater early in the morning. There the silver of his garment, being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays, shone out in a wonderful manner, and was so resplendent as to spread awe over those that looked intently upon him. His flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another, that he was a god; and they added, "Be merciful to us; for although we have until revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth reverence thee as superior to mortal nature." Upon this the king neither rebuked them nor rejected their impious flattery. But he shortly afterward looked up and saw an owl sitting on a certain rope over his head, and immediately understood that this bird was the messenger of ill tidings, just as it had once been the messenger of good tidings to him; and he fell into the deepest sorrow. A severe pain arose in his belly, striking with a most violent intensity. He therefore looked upon his friends, and said, "I, whom you call a god, am commanded presently to depart this life; while Providence thus reproves the lying words you just now said to me; and I, who was by you called immortal, am immediately to be hurried away by death. But I am bound to accept what Providence allots, as it pleases God; for we have by no means lived ill, but in a splendid and happy manner." When he had said this, his pain became violent. Accordingly he was carried into the palace, and the rumor went abroad everywhere that he would certainly die soon. The multitude sat in sackcloth, men, women and children, after the law of their country, and besought God for the king's recovery. All places were also full of mourning and lamentation. Now the king rested in a high chamber, and as he saw them below lying prostrate on the ground he could not keep himself from weeping. And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, being in the fifty-fourth year of his age and in the seventh year of his reign.

We must remember...God sees all, He takes note of the prideful. But also: God takes note of the humble.

Humble: A proper assessment of ourselves and of God. Complete deference to God.

Does God see the humble?

Psalm 18:27

²⁷ *You save the humble
but bring low those whose eyes are haughty.*

Psalm 25:9

⁹ *He guides the humble in what is right
and teaches them his way.*

Let's finish the story.

Acts 12:24-25

²⁴ *But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.*

Barnabas and Saul Sent Off

²⁵ *When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.*

This is a great finish to the story. Look at v24 especially. After all this crazy story of Herod, it almost seems like an incidental, if not anticlimactic statement... *But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.*

But actually, it's the opposite. It is a great climax, because it shows the heart of God and it accentuates this important point:

God blesses the obedient and humble, but brings down the proud.

Look at the opposite picture we see here:

Herod, the King of Israel. Full of splendor (at least in his own mind). He has the power of a king, and uses it against the church. He thought he had the upper hand. Surely God blesses what he does...he is king after all. Better yet, perhaps he is god-like in his own regard. Not even needing the God of Israel.

And on the other hand, you have a humble and obedient church. Seemingly outpowered and outnumbered. Pressed but not crushed, persecuted not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed. Praying earnestly and following the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Which of these won the favor of God?

²⁴ But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.

Psalm 40:4

*⁴ Blessed is the one
who trusts in the LORD,
who does not look to the proud,
to those who turn aside to false gods.*

What a lesson. God is not interested in the flash and polish of man and our achievements. He is more interested in our devotion and obedience.

1 Samuel 17:7

⁷ ...The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

And it proves another important point: *You can't fight God and win!*

One author put it this way:

*History is filled with the stories of men who thought they could fight God and succeed; their ruined lives are evidence that it can't be done. Friedrich Nietzsche was the philosopher who coined the idea that God was dead, and that Christianity was a despised religion of weaklings. Fighting God drove him insane, and he spent the last several years of his life in that condition. Sinclair Lewis won the Nobel Prize for literature, and fought against God in his book *Elmer Gantry*. The book was about an evangelist who was also an alcoholic and would sleep with any woman he could. Sinclair Lewis died a hopeless alcoholic in a clinic near Rome. Writer Ernest Hemingway lived his life of adventure and sin against God seemingly without consequences – until he shot himself in the head with a shotgun. Fighting against God just doesn't work.*

But here is what the Bible says: 2 Chronicles 13:12

¹² ...do not fight against the LORD, the God of your ancestors, for you will not succeed.

Peter's Miraculous Escape From Prison

¹ It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. ² He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. ³ When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

⁶ The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. ⁷ Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

⁸ Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” the angel told him. ⁹ Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

¹¹ Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.”

Tonight I want to highlight the miraculous events in this story.

And work from this premise: *God specializes in the supernatural.*

Did you know that *God wants to do something supernatural in your life?*

Let’s look at the supernatural things in this story:

Verse 7

⁷ Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists.

Let’s break this down: First, it says “suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared”

Appeared out of nowhere. The angel sure didn’t walk in through the conventional entrance. There were 16 guards guarding Peter, and he was chained to two of them. They would’ve seen and heard someone coming. How did the angel “just appear”?

Let’s look at it from the standpoint of the *natural* – the laws of physics:

Newton’s first law of motion states that, if a body is at rest or moving at a constant speed in a straight line, it will remain at rest or keep moving in a straight line at constant speed unless it is acted upon by a force.

Take for instance, this picture of a basketball (show pic)

And notice, this basketball, like every other physical object, is subject to the 3 dimensional space parameters of our world. The 4th dimension being time. This basketball didn't go from this players hands and just "appear" at the goal. It took forces acting on it to propel it.

How did this angel just appear from nowhere? Where did the angel come from? We don't know, it's supernatural.

And notice, a light shone in the cell. A *light* appearing from nowhere. What was the light source? Where did it come from? Light is energy, how does it just appear without a source?

The First Law of Thermodynamics (Conservation) states that energy cannot be created or destroyed. Energy can only be converted from one form into another. Take, for instance, the example of gasoline.

But this light just appeared. Where did the energy for the light come from? We don't know, it's supernatural.

And notice it says "and the chains fell off Peter's wrists"

This is in reference to the chains and shackles used for prisoners at that time. (show pic) There are many references to these chains and shackles in the Bible. They were used, especially by the Romans, to completely subdue the prisoner, forcing them into submission. They were forged of iron, very uncomfortable and abrasive, and virtually impossible to break out of. They literally enslaved the prisoner. It is what Paul referred to in Galatians 5:1

¹ It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

i.e. Don't let yourself be chained and shackled again by what Christ has set you free from!

Paul used this analogy in Galatians because it was a word picture the audience understood, being under Roman rule. *Chains and shackles were real.*

And yet, in our story in Acts 12, these impenetrable chains and shackles literally fell off Peter at the Word of the Lord!

Can God still do that today. Can He speak to our chains?

Lord, speak to my chains today! Break my chains!

There is power in the name of Jesus, to break every chain, to break every chain!

Psalm 2:3

³ *“Let us break their chains
and throw off their shackles.”*

And now - look at verse 10

¹⁰ *They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.*

Let’s break *this* down: First, it says “they passed the first and second guards”. We know that the two guards chained to Peter were probably sleeping. But the other guards were likely standing at their posts.

When guards stood at their posts, their job was to watch for anything. They were held personally responsible for anything that happened on their watch, as we see in vv18-19 at the end of the story:

¹⁸ *In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. ¹⁹After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.*

This was a very real and serious thing!

So how do the angel and Peter “pass the first and second sets of guards” without being even noticed? Did they just tip toe? Were they invisible? Were the guards put in a momentary trance?

We don’t know, it’s supernatural.

So...question for us today: *Can God really move inanimate objects?*

Can God cause things to appear out of nowhere?

Can God’s mere Words shine light in the darkness?

One of the Hebrew names of God is Elohim.

Elohim- the name for an all-powerful God who created all things.

The sentence structure “*in the beginning God*” indicates God’s self-sufficiency, His eternal existence, and His mighty power and sovereignty that can create all that we see.

He is the Mighty God over all of creation – this earth, the sun, moon, and stars – He created all these wonders by the work of His own hand.

And guess what...*He created it out of nothing!*

Only God can create something out of nothing – He can do anything!

The Amplified Version says Genesis 1:1 (Amplified Bible)

¹ *In the beginning God (Elohim) created [by forming from nothing] the heavens and the earth.*

God did it in the beginning, and I believe He can do it whenever He wants – God is supernatural, and works in the supernatural.

And guys, I believe He is about to do it again...in all this chaos we are living in...He is about to show Himself in a powerful way

I’m talking about Elohim: *the all-powerful God who created all things out of nothing!*

And I believe this: God will move heaven and earth to work on our behalf.

OK, so why does God do this? Why does He operate in the supernatural?

To show He is God (then you will know that I am God)

But also:

God’s supernatural is a call to greatness.

God’s extraordinary is a call to:

***Exchange to ordinary for the extraordinary!
Leave the predictable and explore the unimaginable!***

Ephesians 3:20

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us

Even our imagination hasn't even scratched the surface of what God can do, and wants to do!!

God wants to invade our ordinary with His extraordinary

And what is our ordinary?

Our “ordinary” is what we try to control – it’s the familiar - it includes our “acts of the flesh” - bondage, neurosis, fear, worry, insecurity, doubt, and despair, resentment, anger, unforgiveness, depression, addictions, etc.

God’s “extraordinary” doesn’t include any of that

The very definition of extraordinary is

Very unusual or remarkable. Unusually great.

Look at Peter’s reaction to what happened in this story:

⁹ Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision.

¹¹ Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.”

Peter was initially bound to ordinary, thinking he was seeing a vision. But once his faith took over and he realized he was in the middle of a God moment, He stepped into the extraordinary!

So I want to close with this question:

Are you ready to step out of the natural and expect the supernatural?

Isaiah 64:4

*⁴ Since ancient times no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.*

God wants to do a work that is larger than we are!

Romans 8:14-17 (The Message)

... God's Spirit beckons. There are things to do and places to go! This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike "What's next, Papa?" God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children.

(unpack this)

You say, but wait a minute Pastor...I'm confused...just last week you were talking about how God calls me to draw near to Him to change me and now you're talking about greatness and victory as a result of intimacy with God.

Stick with me here....

But look again at the statements:

Intimacy with God is call to:

**Exchange to ordinary for the extraordinary!
Leave the predictable and explore the unimaginable!
Step out of the natural and expect the supernatural**

If those statements are true, then by deduction, the following is true:

There is no room for our ordinary in God's extraordinary!

He is not interested in putting perfume on a pig!

Another way of saying this:

There cannot be a new beginning until there is an end to the old

We will not be able to embrace an extraordinary destiny by holding onto our brokenness

Likewise...we cannot walk into our future by holding onto our past

God wants so badly to do something extraordinary in our lives!

So guess what has to go?! *Our ordinary! Our "old"!*

**it is baggage that's not meant for the trip*

That's what we've been referring to as "change" – "pruning"

This changing and pruning of our ordinary is necessary in order to step into the extraordinary

And what triggered these miraculous acts of God?

⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

Let's unpack this paragraph a bit. Notice in v1

¹ It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.

“*this time*” refers to the events explained in the earlier chapters

Paul had gone through his conversion experience

Stephen had just been stoned to death

Persecution of the church was beginning to get fierce

But the gospel was reaching the Gentiles

The church was exploding

In the previous chapter 11, we see in Antioch alone:

²¹ The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

Regarding Barnabas:

²⁴ He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

In vv25 & 26 great numbers of people were being discipled. It was there in Antioch that the term "Christians" was first used.

So this is good, right? Praise God! But notice, it says *It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.*

King Herod had set his sights on making an example of the church for political gain

James, the brother of John, was executed

And now, Peter, one of the key apostles, was captured and apparently on track to meet the same doom

Last week we discussed *mindsets...of belief or unbelief.*

Tonight: This story is a stark reminder....

The enemy has no intention of letting the church flourish.

He is not going to roll over...

Jesus warned us of the enemy's intentions:

John 10:10

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

A contrast of intentions...giving life vs stealing, killing, and destroying...good vs evil. God wants to bless us...the enemy wants to curse us...God wants your marriage...etc...

And in this context, God wants the church to flourish, the enemy wants the church to die.

This is an important concept we must understand.

We are at war. And in a war it is attack-counter-attack.

We get in trouble when we forget this. Have you ever had an experience where you were blessed, had a real breakthrough...and then *whammo*, something negative happens that seems to steal your joy? This should not surprise us.

The enemy rages when God blesses. (it is attack-counter attack)

This is not meant to frighten us or discourage us (I didn't sign up for this...)

This is simply meant to inform and prepare us.

2 Corinthians 2:11

¹¹ in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

This is what professional sports is all about. One team trying to impose its will on the other. Can you imagine a player saying "Hey, it's not fair, these guys are trying to get me out"

Jesus said in Matthew 11:12

¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it.

John 16:33

³³ "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

We are in a war...and *We are not called to fight defensively, we are called to fight offensively.*

Matthew 16:18

¹⁸ ...and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Gates are stationary.

We've got the power in the name of Jesus...

Go after it...don't passively sit around...fight for your freedom...fight for your destiny...your dreams...marriage...family...your unsaved loved ones. God never told you to give up!

Is there a lack of victory or blessing in your life? Perhaps there is an area where you have given up...

There is no condemnation from God on this. He would simply say "Get back in there!"

And getting back to our story in Acts 12, God never told the church to stop fighting.

James was killed, and Peter was in jail...and it looked like he would be next. But look at the church's response in v5:

⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

Question: *What do you do when it looks like the enemy is winning?*

What we do in a setback (and in the middle of a struggle) says more about our faith than anything we profess on Sunday morning!

We are called to prayer! Earnest prayer! That means *fervent, showing sincere and intense conviction and dedication.*

James 5:16

¹⁶ ...The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

A study of the original text in Greek expands the meaning a little...

The heartfelt and persistent prayer

That is the definition of earnest: *fervent, heartfelt, persistent, sincere, intense conviction and dedication*

That is what we are called to now more than ever! It is the time to take the kingdom! Rise, up, be strong, 'Tis Christ's command. For every power...

And that is what we see the early church doing here in the story...

So - was their earnest prayer effective? Was it powerful and effective?

Acts 12:6-11

⁶The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. ⁷Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

⁸Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. ⁹Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

¹¹Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen."

I would say their prayers were effective. "Without a doubt", Peter said.

Question: *What would happen in your life with fervent prayer?*

What miracles might take place? What changes could God make?

Oh what peace we often forfeit...

Chapter 12 starts out pretty bad for the church. But again, notice it says *It was about this time*

⁵ *So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.*

⁶ *The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. ⁷ Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists.*

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¹¹ *Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.”*

¹² *When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. ¹³ Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. ¹⁴ When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, “Peter is at the door!”*

¹⁵ “You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.”

¹⁶ But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. ¹⁷ Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. “Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this,” he said, and then he left for another place.

¹⁸ In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. ¹⁹ After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

This was Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, who ruled in the days of Jesus’ birth ([Matthew 2:1-16](#)). Herod Agrippa I was also the nephew of Herod Antipas, who had a role in the trial of Jesus ([Luke 23:7-12](#)).

b. **Stretched out his hand to harass some from the church:** No doubt, this was done because it was politically popular for Herod. It pleased many of his citizens who didn’t like Christians. Many political figures are ready to persecute Christians if it will make them politically popular.

2. (2) *The death of the apostle James.*

Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

a. **Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword:** This was a new development in the history of the church. Of the twelve who followed Jesus, James was the first to be martyred.

i. Up to [Acts 12](#), the church had been on a streak of success, experiencing one exciting conversion after another. First there was Saul of Tarsus, then the Gentile centurion Cornelius, then the highly successful work among Gentiles (and Jews) in Antioch. But in [Acts 12](#), the ugly opposition inspired by Satan again raised its head.

ii. James was certainly not the first *Christian* to die in faithfulness to Jesus. Stephen ([Acts 7:58-60](#)) was martyred before this, and certainly others were also. But the death of James shattered the illusion that somehow, the twelve enjoyed a unique Divine protection.

b. **James the brother of John:** James, in particular, might have thought to have been protected. He was one of the special intimates of Jesus, often mentioned with his brother John and with Peter ([Matthew 17:1](#), [26:37](#), [Mark 5:37](#), [9:2](#), [14:33](#); [Luke 5:37](#), [9:2](#), and [14:33](#)).

i. But Jesus promised no special protection for even His closest followers; He warned them to be ready for persecution ([Matthew 10:16-26](#)).

ii. In [Mark 10:35-40](#), John and his brother James came to Jesus and asked to be considered His two chief lieutenants. Jesus replied to them, *You do not know what you ask. Can you drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?* James and John, not really knowing what they were saying, replied by saying they

could. Jesus promised them, *You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized*. This martyrdom was the fulfillment of that promise for James. John fulfilled it by a lifetime of devoted service to God despite repeated attempts to martyr him.

c. **With the sword**: Normally, this means that James was beheaded. Eusebius relates a story from Clement of Alexandria, who said the soldier guarding James before the judge was so affected by his witness that he declared himself a Christian also and was also willingly executed for Jesus along side of James (Eusebius, *Church History* 2.9.2-3).

i. Significantly, there was no attempt to replace James, as there was to replace Judas ([Acts 1](#)). This was because James died as a faithful martyr, but Judas revealed his apostasy in betraying Jesus. There was no need for another man to take the office of James.

B. The release of Peter from prison.

1. (3-4) Herod imprisons Peter.

And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.

a. **Because he saw that it pleased the Jews**: Seeing his increased popularity when he killed James, Herod sought to improve his ratings even more when **he proceeded further to seize Peter also**.

i. There was a significant difference between the persecution from Saul of Tarsus ([Acts 8:1-3](#)) and from Herod. Saul, wrong as he was, persecuted out of sincere (though misguided) religious conviction; Herod persecuted out of purely political motives.

b. **Intending to bring him before the people after Passover**: Herod decided to deal with Peter at a politically opportune time, fearing an unpredictable mob reaction when Passover pilgrims filled Jerusalem.

i. Horton suggests three reasons for the delay in executing Peter: (1) Herod wanted to show how scrupulously he observed the Passover; (2) he wanted to wait until the pilgrim crowds went home, fearing a riot; (3) he wanted to wait until he had the full attention of the Jewish population.

c. **Delivered him to four squads of soldiers**: Knowing Peter (with the other apostles) had mysteriously escaped from prison before ([Acts 5:17-21](#)), Herod assigned a high-security detail to guard Peter.

i. "Normally it was considered enough for a prisoner to be handcuffed to one soldier, but as a special precaution Peter had a soldier each side of him and both his wrists were manacled" (Stott)

ii. "So there were always four soldiers guarding Peter. Extraordinary precautions were also taken by chaining him to two soldiers instead of one as usual (compare Seneca, *Epistulae*, 5:7). The other two soldiers kept watch outside the cell." (Hughes)

2. (5) *The church prays for Peter.*

Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.

a. **Prayer was offered to God for him by the church:** In this contest, Herod had his soldiers and his prisons; but the church had the power of prayer. The outcome would soon be seen, and easily decided.

i. **Peter was therefore kept in prison**, but the church was free to pray. When every other gate is shut and locked, the gate to heaven is wide open. We take advantage of that open gate through prayer.

b. **Constant prayer was offered to God for him:** The word **constant** also has the idea of *earnest*; literally, the word pictures someone *stretching out all they can for something*. “The verb *ektenos* is related to *ektenes*, a medical term describing the stretching of a muscle to its limits.” (MacArthur)

i. Luke uses this same word *ektenos* for the agonizing prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane ([Luke 22:44](#)).

ii. Much of our prayer is powerless because it lacks earnestness. Too often we almost pray with the attitude of wanting God to care about things we really don't care too much about.

iii. *Earnest* prayer has power not because it in itself persuades a reluctant God. Instead, it demonstrates that our heart cares passionately about the things God cares about, fulfilling Jesus' promise *If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you* ([John 15:7](#)).

c. **Constant prayer was offered to God:** It is also important to see that the church prayed **to God**. It may seem obvious, but often our prayers are weak because we are not consciously coming into the presence of our great and holy God, offering our requests to Him.

3. (6-11) *God sends an angel to free Peter from prison.*

And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, “Arise quickly!” And his chains fell off his hands. Then the angel said to him, “Gird yourself and tie on your sandals”; and so he did. And he said to him, “Put on your garment and follow me.” So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. And when Peter had come to himself, he said, “Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and *from* all the expectation of the Jewish people.”

a. **That night Peter was sleeping:** Peter showed no signs of anxiety. He was able to sleep soundly on what seemed to be the last night before his execution. Remember, *He gives His beloved sleep* ([Psalm 127:2](#)).

b. **Bound with two chains between two soldiers...guards before the door:** The chains, the guards, the prison doors meant nothing to God and His appointed messengers; Peter was instantly set free.

c. **Did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision:** Peter obeyed without really knowing what was happening. He knew enough to sense that God was doing something and the explanation could come later.

d. **They came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord:** The soldiers, the chains, the guard posts, the iron gate – were all nothing when God was with Peter and prayer was behind him.

i. Many of us worry about the **iron gate** before we ever get to it. A month beforehand, and we are anxious about the **iron gate**! But God will take care of it when we come to it. For Peter, it opened **of its own accord**. That phrase uses the ancient Greek word, *automate*. One could say that the gates opened automatically for Peter.

ii. F.F. Bruce relates the story of Sundar Singh, a Tibetan Christian who was likewise freed miraculously from a prison. For preaching of the gospel, he was thrown into a well, and a cover set over it and securely locked. He would be left in the well until he died, and he could see the bones and rotting corpses of those who had already perished in there. On the third night of his imprisonment, he heard someone unlocking the cover of the well and removing it. A voice told him to take hold of the rope that was being lowered. Sundar was grateful that the rope had a loop he could put his foot in, because he had injured his arm in the fall down into the well. He was raised up, the cover was replaced and locked, but when he looked to thank his rescuer he could find no one. When morning came, he went back to the same place he was arrested and started preaching again. News of the preaching came to the official who had him arrested, and Sundar was brought before him again. When the official said someone must have gotten the key and released him, they searched for the key – and found it on the official's own belt. God is still writing the Book of Acts!

e. **And has delivered me from the hand of Herod:** James was martyred ([Acts 12:1-2](#)) and Peter was rescued. The reasons God does such things, or does not do them, are often known only to Him. We do know that James, having graduated to glory, did not consider himself a loser in any way.

i. Simply, it wasn't time for Peter to go to his heavenly home yet. Until it was time, he was invulnerable. He couldn't be harmed. It was time for James; it was not time for Peter.

4. (12-17) Peter presents himself to the believers that prayed for him.

So, when he had considered *this*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, because of *her* gladness she did not open the gate, but ran

in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. But they said to her, “You are beside yourself!” Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, “It is his angel.” Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened *the door* and saw him, they were astonished. But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, “Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren.” And he departed and went to another place.

a. **He came to the house of Mary...knocked at the door of the gate:** Peter naturally went to where he knew Christians would be gathered and praying. They would want to know that their prayers had been answered.

b. **Because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate:** Rhoda was so excited to hear from Peter that she left him out at the gate! The natural, true-to-life feel of these accounts show the reliable historical character of the Book of Acts.

c. **But they said to her, “You are beside yourself!”** We are comforted (and amused) by the little faith of these Christians. Even while they prayed for Peter, they found it hard to believe God actually answered their prayer.

i. Their prayer was earnest ([Acts 12:5](#)), but their faith was not overwhelming. Little faith can accomplish great things if it is placed in the great God.

d. **It is his angel:** The Jews believed in the idea of guardian angels, and it seems that some among them may have believed that one’s guardian angel bore some kind of resemblance to the human it was assigned to.

e. **Go, tell these things to James and the brethren:** The **James** that Peter told others to report to was not the James who was just martyred. It was probably James, the brother of Jesus, who was a prominent figure in the church at Jerusalem.

f. **And he departed and went to another place:** Except for a brief mention in [Acts 15](#), this is the last Luke speaks of Peter. We know that Peter later met Paul in Antioch ([Galatians 2:11-14](#)), and later he wrote his two letters.

5. (18-19) *The execution of the soldiers who guarded Peter.*

Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that *they* should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed *there*.

a. **There was no small stir:** This is one of the great understatements of the Bible. Herod was furious that his prized prisoner had escaped.

b. **He examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death:** The execution of the guards was customary. In that day, if a guard’s prisoner escaped, the guard was given the penalty due to the prisoner – in this case, death.

There are a few things to look at it in this story. Tonight’s study is about perspective. As we begin to unpack this story, first, I’ll start out by showing you this picture of a vase

Or is it a picture of two faces?

According to neuroscientists, what we see depends on the patterns of neural activity in our brains. They found these patterns of neural activity systematically change as perception changes.

Get that: *perception*

Perception, perceive: *to become aware of, know, or identify by means of the senses, especially sight or hearing; to recognize, discern, envision, or understand*

How we perceive things, interpret them.

I'm talking about the way we see life...the lens through which you see

Another way of saying this:

Our mindset has a lot to do with what we see and how we see

Let's take a look at the mindset of the early church in our text:

In Acts 12:1 it begins by saying...

¹ It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.

“*this time*” refers to the events explained in the earlier chapters

Paul had gone through his conversion experience

Stephen had just been stoned to death

Persecution of the church was beginning to get fierce

The gospel was reaching the Gentiles

King Herod had set his sights on making an example of the church for political gain

James, the brother of John, was executed

And now, Peter, one of the key apostles, was captured and apparently on track to meet the same doom

I say “apparently” because this was what the “evidence” was

i.e. this was the understanding, the perception of the situation

In their minds...Peter was a goner

Looking at vv2-4:

Herod had James killed, and saw that it was a popular move with the Jews (his public approval rating went up)

He said “*Hey, if you liked that, just wait to see what I do with their leader Peter.*”

And then had Peter arrested and guarded by not one set of guards, not 2, or even 3....4 sets of guards...16 guards total

Oh well, nice knowing you Peter!!

It was over, done deal, sianara, adios

In other words...It was a situation bigger than they were...it was beyond them

Question: *Are you also facing things bigger than you are?*

In our nation...in our own healing from brokenness, church, in our families, in our marriages

And if we are not in the right mindset, the enormity and impossibility of the task will become the mindset through which we see it.

Back to our story of the early church:

So, they are facing a major crisis

Ah, but thank God someone said “*Hey, maybe we should pray about the situation*” There’s a novel idea

⁵ *So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.*

Yes, they were praying...and that's good

But I propose to you that *The church, even though they were praying, was seeing the situation from the mindset of unbelief.*

Look at v15

¹⁵ *"You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel."*

Here they are "earnestly praying" for Peter...

And then when God answered their prayer...the miracle happens (look at how the passage is titled **Peter's Miraculous Escape From Prison**)

* when God answered their prayer.....**they didn't believe it!**

In fact...*Their unbelief kept their answer to prayer waiting at the door!*

And they almost missed it altogether

I can just hear them now...."*Oh Lord, show Yourself mighty Lord, free our brother Peter from prison*"....and in the back of their mind they were thinking "*Ah, who are we kidding, King Herod's a powerful man, we can't even touch this situation, Peter's done for....we might as well move on*

(knock knock knock) *Hey, Peter's at the front door!*

Don't bother me now....I'm praying....Oh Lord, show Yourself....

(knock knock knock) *Hey, seriously...Peter's at the front door!*

Yeah, right, get out of here. He's a dead man...maybe it's his ghost. Oh Lord, show Yourself...

We can laugh, but we do the same thing:

Lord, please change me Lord (ah, who am I kidding, I'll never change)

Lord, please help me to be a better Christian (yeah right, I'll fail at that just like I have failed with everything else)

Lord, please save my marriage (yeah right, it's been like this for 20 years...)

Lord, please help me to be a better wife (hey, why should I change change....he never seems to try....I'll make an effort when I start seeing him make an effort)

Lord, please give me a job....

Lord, please save my kids...

Lord, please send revival...

And because of our unbelief, we leave our miracle, our destiny, waiting at the door!

Hear me on this:

We lie to God in prayer if we don't rely on God after prayer

Maybe I'm a little old fashioned....but I think "earnestly praying" about a situation should include faith that God hears and is moved by our prayers, and will act in His timing and in His way!

Hebrews 11:6

⁶And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

There's that word "earnestly" again. (Boy, this guy Earnest really gets around!)

Earnest prayer without earnest faith is just noise.

In conclusion:

We've been saying this is the year for breakout and breakthrough.

God is about to do something wonderful and new. But we must be in the right mindset or we may miss it.

What is a good mindset then, Pastor? What is a mindset that will please the Lord? What is a mindset that will have me positioned to receive the blessing God has for me?

Here is a good example:

Mark 9:24

²⁴ Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

This was in response to the words of Jesus Himself who said "*everything is possible for one who believes*"

"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

That's just being honest with the Lord

(Expand on this)

Jim Cymbala (pastor of multi-racial megachurch The Brooklyn Tabernacle) said :

"Faith is the total dependence on God that becomes supernatural in its working. People with faith develop a second kind of sight. They see more than just the circumstances; they see God, right beside them..."

I believe this is what it means in the bible when it says:

2 Corinthians 10:5

⁵We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

We do have the power to control what we think about! I just showed you that! (Vase vs face)

When are we going to get some good old fashioned tenacity and downright holy stubbornness that says *“I’m not listening to the voice of doubt any longer. God said it, that’s good enough for me”!!!*

That’s a mindset God can work with! One that says:

I can do all things through Christ.....

Like a little boy that thinks his dad is a superhero

“My Dad can beat up your dad”

Maybe you say *“That sounds good, but I’m not there”*

A change in mindset starts with humility and repentance

During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) ²⁹ The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. ³⁰ This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Though this last part of Chapter 11 is only 4 verses long, there is a lot here.

First of all, notice there was a prediction of a coming severe famine.

Was there really a famine? Or was this some kind of old symbolism...a metaphor, maybe...

Is the Bible literal? Or is it a bunch of old stories and folklore, as some would have you believe (my humanities class)

2 Timothy 3:16

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness

And Jesus Himself said:

Matthew 24:35

³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

And He prayed in John 17 when He was praying for me and you:

John 17:17

¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

Can we all say this: *God’s Word is truth.*

And we don't have the luxury or option of picking and choosing what we believe to be true.

Francis Schaeffer said the faithful believer is the one who holds a "full" or "strong, uncompromising view of Scripture."

Do you have a strong, uncompromising view of scripture?

Are you convinced it is truth?

You see, I'm just wild-eyed enough to believe that God's Word is true...that He created all we see...I believe there was a flood that covered the whole earth...I believe God saved His people from slavery in Egypt, parted the Red Sea, and led them on a journey that included turning back a river and stopping the sun in the sky.

And like the apostles, I can say:

*I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.*

*I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.*

*On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.*

And in the case of tonight's story, I believe the Holy Spirit can reveal things to His people. In this case, there was a prediction of a coming famine. *Was this prediction true?* Are these just Bible stories with no historical basis?

Well, first of all...Acts 11 says *This happened during the reign of Claudius*

Was there really a Claudius?

Claudius Caesar was the fifth Roman emperor and reigned 13 years until his wife Agrippina killed him by poisoning him so her son could take over. In 45

AD, in the 4th year of his reign, a great famine occurred and was centered in Judea. This proved to be a devastating famine, with much loss and death. The historian Josephus said this famine was intense and lasted for approx. 3 years.

So, indeed there really was a Claudius, and there was a famine. And notice, the Holy Spirit gave them a warning through a prophet's prediction.

Why does God give us warnings? So we will freak out and run?

In this case, He gave them the warning of a famine so could prepare, and help others prepare giving where there was need.

Obviously, the believers took the warning seriously:

²⁹ The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea.

God gives us warnings so we will prepare.

Other examples:

Joseph.

How about the Passover?

So, for us...question: *Will the Holy Spirit give us warnings today?*

Have you ever experienced that?

Did you know that is one of the ministries of the HS? That is part of being led by the Spirit.

Isaiah 30:21

²¹ Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

Last thing to point out tonight:

Notice the disciples' default reaction:

²⁹ The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. ³⁰ This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

In the face of pending crisis, their heart turned to charity.

What is our default reaction during a crisis?

We don't have to think too hard about that question, all we have to do is remember our state of mind in March of 2020. We saw a society bent on protecting our own...getting our share...as evidenced by the run on stores...people stockpiling more toilet paper than they could use in a year...I remember what the grocery store looked like...

But did we think of others?

The Bible says:

James 1:27

²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Expand on

1 John 3:17-18

¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

Both of these hit this point very well: As believers, we are called to think of others before ourselves, and help those in need.

And if we don't, we should check our faith.

Guys: this is the church being the church. And this is a church God will bless. Let us be like the first church in this regard. Look what it says way back in Chapter 4:

Acts 4:32-35

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Explain our church's record on giving.

Acts 11:1-26

Peter Explains His Actions

¹ The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him ³ and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

This was talking about the Jewish believers. Remember, the gospel came first to the Jews, but God intended them to take it into the whole world. These Jewish believers did not understand that yet.

Remember, Jesus said in Acts 1:8

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Even though Jesus said these words, His Jewish followers did not understand that the division between the Jews and Gentiles had been lifted. They were in good company. Peter himself didn't realize it until God appeared to him in the vision of the animals and the sheet. And so he goes on to explain to them in detail everything that had happened.

⁴ Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: ⁵ “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. ⁶ I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. ⁷ Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’

⁸ “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

⁹ “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ ¹⁰ This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

¹¹ “Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. ¹² The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house. ¹³ He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send

to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. ¹⁴ He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’

¹⁵ “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. **Notice...this is God giving His approval. How could they argue with that?** ¹⁶ Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with^[a] water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷ So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?”

¹⁸ When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

They were convinced. God was in it. Praise God.

Question: How do we know if God is in something? Have you ever struggled with that?

Maybe you’ve been praying about an issue and you feel like God has made a promise, or perhaps you feel that He is already moving in something. And now you are standing in faith. But there is often a little doubt. ***I think God is in this...but what of He’s not?***

How do we know? What is the test? How did these Jewish believers know God was in the story Peter was telling?

These are good questions. And I’ve seen many a believer, myself included, struggling with this. *So how do we know?*

First of all, it will never go against the Word of God.

Jesus said:

Matthew 24:35

³⁵ *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*

Secondly, God will often use others to confirm it.

Proverbs 11:14

¹⁴ *Where there is no counsel, the people fall;
But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.*

And lastly, the Holy Spirit is consistent. He is not sporadic.

Hebrews 13:8

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Guys - God knows your heart...if you are genuinely trying to discern whether this is Him, He will give you confirmation. Sometimes it comes by way of the event happening or not.

If it happens then apparently God was in it.

In the case of this story in Acts 11, Jesus had been saying all along the Word would go out to the Gentiles. And then He gave them the famous command in Acts 1:8. *Moving on...*

The Church in Antioch

¹⁹ Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. ²⁰ Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. ²¹ The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

²² News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. ²⁴ He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

²⁵ Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

So indeed, the gospel was going out to all the world, like Jesus intended. Some of the believers were only talking to other Jews. But some, however, were talking the gospel to Greeks and other gentiles. And notice v21:

²¹ The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

Clearly, God was in this. It was God’s will. And notice it says “the Lord’s hand was with them”.

This phrase “the Lord’s hand” or “the hand of God” is used dozens of times in the Bible. It has several implications when you look at the context:

It implies God’s might:

1 Peter 5:6-7

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

It implies God’s provision:

In the prayer of Jabez:

1 Chronicles 4:9–10

⁹ Jabez was more honorable than his brothers; and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, “Because I bore him in pain.” ¹⁰ Jabez called upon the God of Israel, saying, “Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from harm³ so that it might not bring me pain!” And God granted what he asked.

It implies God’s care and compassion:

Psalm 16:11

*¹¹ You make known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

And as I thought about it I realized “of course” His hand...the hand is the point of touch.

The Human hand is the most sensitive part of any body God created. It has more corpuscles and nerve endings per square inch than any other part of creation. And considering we are made in God’s image, the implications are amazing...God created the entire universe with His hands...He upholds and sustains it with His hands...He fights off our enemies with His hands...He grants favor with His hands...and yet He

gently holds us with His hands...sensitive to our needs...feeling our hurts...wiping away our tears...

OK, let's wrap this up...

Notice the references to Antioch in the last section of Acts 11 I read. Cyrus and Cyrene went to Antioch to bring the gospel to the Greeks. The Lord's hand was on them. A great number was added to the kingdom. Barnabas arrived and continued discipling the new believers. Many more were added. The church was exploding...God's favor was on it all. Then Saul came and stayed a year there and taught them the Way. Antioch was the place the term *Christian* was first used. Before that, they were called disciples, saints, believers, brothers and sisters, followers, etc. And by the way, the word "Christian" when broken down in the original Greek language meant: Christ follower, or Christ-ite. It implied the person was a soldier for Jesus.

Are you a soldier for Jesus?

All this is good, but it's even better when you consider the place where all this was happening.

Antioch was founded several years after Alexander the Great, around 300 BC. It was near the Mediterranean Sea about 300 miles north of Jerusalem. (show map)

It was a large city known for its commerce, but also known for its debauchery. There were temples erected to worship ancient Syrian pagan gods. In these temples, prostitution was common. Immorality ran amuck in this city.

And yet it was in this city that gospel flourished. Now we see the importance of God's hand being on them.

When God places His hand of favor on something, nothing can stop it!

This also proves firsthand what Romans 5:20 says

²⁰ *...But where sin increased, grace increased all the more*

2. (22-24) *The ministry of Barnabas in Antioch.*

Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

a. **They sent out Barnabas:** The church in Jerusalem sent an able man in Barnabas, previously known for his generosity (Acts 4:36-37) and his warm acceptance of Saul of Tarsus after he was converted (Acts 9:26-28).

i. “News was always getting back to Jerusalem, and I suppose it is always that way. Whenever anything is done, there is always somebody who will run to those who are supposed to be important and say, ‘Do you know what’s going on?’” (Boice)

b. **When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad:** At the church in Antioch, when Barnabas **had seen the grace of God, he was glad**. There was something in the work and atmosphere among the followers of Jesus in Antioch that made Barnabas able to *see* the **grace of God**.

i. In whatever gathering of Christians we associate ourselves with, it is important that others be able to see **the grace of God** among us. They should not see an emphasis on self, on man-made rules, on human performance – but on the glorious **grace of God**. It will make them **glad**.

c. **Encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord:** Barnabas rightly focused on his main job as a leader of the congregation. He strengthened the church family itself, with the result that **a great many people were added to the Lord**.

i. This is the plan for church growth spoken of in Ephesians 4:11-16. Leaders in the church dedicate themselves to building strong, healthy Christians. As the saints are equipped for the work of the ministry, they grow into maturity, and do their ministry, and it *causes growth of the body*.

3. (25-26) *Barnabas and Saul work together in Antioch.*

Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

a. **Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul:** Barnabas remembered the precious brother Saul, and how he was sent to Tarsus for his own protection (Acts 9:28-30). Now Barnabas went and found him.

i. It’s not difficult to think of Barnabas being exhausted and overwhelmed by all the work and opportunities in Antioch, and then remembering Saul of Tarsus.

ii. **To seek Saul** is more literally *to hunt him up*; Barnabas had to do some looking. MacArthur says the original word “suggests a laborious search on Barnabas’ part.” Saul

was so valuable to Barnabas that it was worth it for him to leave the work in Antioch for a season and search hard to find him.

b. **So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people.** Together, Barnabas and Saul **taught a great many people**, making the church in Antioch strong.

i. Saul had spent some twelve years in Tarsus since we last met him; these years were not wasted or lost, but spent in quiet ministry and preparation for future service.

ii. In all this Antioch became a center for great teaching and preaching. Antioch “had the greatest preachers – in the first century Barnabas, Paul, and Peter; in the second Ignatius and Theophilus; in the third and fourth Lucian, Theodore, Chrysostom, and Theodoret.” (Hughes)

iii. But it also had great *informal* preaching, which is often the best kind. Acts 11:20 reminds us that they *spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus*. This combination of great formal teaching/preaching and great informal teaching/preaching made the church community in Antioch something special and world-impacting.

c. **The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch:** It wasn’t until these years at the Church in Syrian Antioch that the name *Christian* became associated with the followers of Jesus.

- They had been called disciples (Acts 1:15).

- They had been called saints (Acts 9:13).

- They had been called believers (Acts 5:14).

- They had been called brothers (Acts 6:3).

- They had been called witnesses (Acts 5:32).

- They had been called followers of the Way (Acts 9:2).

- They would be called Nazarenes (Acts 24:5).

- *Now* they would be called Christians.

i. In Latin, the ending *ian* meant “the party of.” A *Christ-ian* was “of the party of Jesus.” **Christians** was sort of like saying “Jesus-ites,” or “Jesus People,” describing the people associated with Jesus Christ. Boice thinks the idea was that they were called “Christ-ones.”

ii. Also, soldiers under particular generals in the Roman army identified themselves by their general’s name by adding *ian* to the end. A soldier under Caesar would call himself a *Caesarian*. Soldiers under Jesus Christ could be called **Christians**.

iii. In Antioch, they probably first used the term **Christians** to mock the followers of Jesus. “Antioch was famous for its readiness to jeer and call names; it was known by its witty epigrams.” (Gaebelein) But as the people of Antioch called the followers of Jesus the “Jesus People,” the believers appreciated the title so much that it stuck.

iv. “Ironside says that when he was traveling in China years ago he was frequently introduced as ‘Yasu-yan.’ At first he did not know what the word meant, but he asked about it and learned that *Yasu* was the Cantonese word for Jesus, and *yan* was ‘man.’ So he was being introduced as a ‘Jesus man.’” (Boice)

v. **First called Christians** can also have the idea that they were **called Christians** before they were called anything else. Their *first identity* was now to be called Christians. Today, Christians must be willing to take at least the idea of the title “Jesus People,” and must also be *worthy* of the name. Instead of claiming any other title – Roman Catholic, Protestant, charismatic, whatever – we should be **first called Christians**.

vi. Eusebius, the famous early church historian, described a believer named Sanctus from Lyons, France, who was tortured for Jesus. As they tortured him cruelly, they hoped to get him to say something evil or blasphemous. They asked his name, and he only replied, “I am a Christian.” “What nation do you belong to?” He answered, “I am a Christian.” “What city do you live in?” “I am a Christian.” His questioners began to get angry: “Are you a slave or a free man?” “I am a Christian” was his only reply. No matter what they asked about him, he only answered, “I am a Christian.” This made his torturers all the more determined to break him, but they could not, and he died with the words “I am a Christian” on his lips. (Eusebius, *Church History*)

Peter at Cornelius’s House

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along.²⁴ The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

What we see here are two men who have never met each other – these men couldn’t possibly be any different. One is a Roman centurion, the other a Jewish apostle of Jesus Christ. Yet each one is honoring the other. But really, they were honoring the Lord, who had orchestrated this meeting. And to really understand the significance, we need to remember...Peter was a pious Jew, trained in the Torah. The traditional Old Testament teaching was that Jews were supposed to be set apart...they didn’t mingle with gentiles, much less go into their house to visit. This scene was a real leap of faith for both Peter and Cornelius. But again, they both faith that God had put this together.

Question: *Are we open to God's unexpected "arranged meetings"?*

This 10th chapter is usually associated with Cornelius. And rightly so, he was a great example of God's desire for the gospel to go into the whole world, reaching beyond the Jews.

But I propose this chapter is just as much about Peter as it was Cornelius. Peter also underwent a significant conversion. Putting aside all the piety of his upbringing and obeying God by meeting with this Roman centurion.

Let's get back to the story:

²⁵ As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. ²⁶ But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

So here we see Cornelius honoring Peter...even to point of being excessive. Peter wasn't having it. He knew he was not to be worshipped...he was a mere man. But we do have a tendency to do that, don't we? It's easy to put people we admire and revere up on a pedestal.

In St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican in Rome, a large statue of Peter. Visitors traditionally kiss the foot of the statue and pray to St. Peter asking him to be merciful and open the gates of heaven for them if they died.

Frankly, I believe Peter would have cringed at the idea of people praying to him, much less kissing his foot.

So...question: *Is it OK to pray to people who have passed on before us? How about if we call them a saint first?*

Let's start with the question: *Who is a saint in a Biblical sense?*

Are saints the great people of God who have passed on before us? People who have earned the right to be called a saint because of deeds they have done?

Acts 9:32

³² Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda.

The word "saint" is derived from a Greek word *hagiazō*, which means "to set apart, " "sanctify, " or "make holy."

And who makes us holy?

Hebrews 2:11

¹¹ Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.

Therefore: *Who are saints?*

From a Biblical standpoint: *Saints are Christians, the body of Christ, the church.*

i.e. if you are a believer...you are a saint!

Getting back to the first question: *Is it Biblical to pray to people who have passed on?*

There is nothing in the Bible that says the dead have any power or influence on what happens on earth.

All we know is what it says it will be like in heaven:

Revelation 21:4

⁴ 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'

And we are told in the Old Testament specifically not to try to consult with the dead.

My talking at gravesite

Getting back to our story, think about this for a moment...this was choice irony, and maybe even a dream come true for some Jews...a highly ranked Roman officer bowing at his feet and worshipping him. But Peter wasn't having any of it. He addressed it when he said in v26

²⁶ ... "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

Let's move on...

²⁷ While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸ He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”

Peter is being honest about his struggle with this scene. He knows God told him to go there. But nonetheless, it still seems odd and uncomfortable for him. But more important than all that...he had caught the vision that God gave him of the sheet and the animals. He was filled with the Spirit and had a message burning in him that he had to get out!

When God puts a message in our hearts, it is meant to be delivered.

Have you ever experienced that?

Jeremiah 20:9

*⁹ But if I say, “I will not mention his word
or speak anymore in his name,”
his word is in my heart like a fire,
a fire shut up in my bones.
I am weary of holding it in;
indeed, I cannot.*

³⁰ Cornelius answered: “Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me ³¹ and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. ³² Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’ ³³ So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. ³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit

and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

³⁹ “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, ⁴⁰ but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. ⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Now notice:

*⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers (**Jewish believers**) who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.*

This is amazing. Peter was only speaking the simple gospel message. He wasn't trying to conjure up anything, or trying to get the people lathered up for a powerful move of the Spirit. The attitude and obedience of the people in the room was all the Holy Spirit needed to come in and move. They were hungry and obedient – that was it! That is what positioned them for this powerful move of the Holy Spirit.

What could God do in our church if we were positioned like that?

This event has been labeled by scholars as the “Gentile Pentecost”

Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” ⁴⁸ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

Notice the significance here. First of all, all the power of the upper room experience that happened to the apostles was now happening here in this Roman centurion's home, with spiritual gifts on full display. That alone was amazing enough.

But also notice, they were baptized in the Holy Spirit, *then* baptized in water.

John the Baptist said Matthew 3:11

¹¹ “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

The insinuation being that there was an order to things. Get baptized in water first, then baptized in the Spirit.

But the Holy Spirit blew all that up here in this scene, proving:

- **The Holy Spirit doesn’t discriminate. He will fill anyone who wants to be filled.**
- **The Holy Spirit will move however He wants to move.**

When the Jews showed this kind of partiality they were not being faithful to God’s heart as revealed in the Old Testament. The idea that God shows no partiality is also stated in [Deuteronomy 10:17](#) and [2 Chronicles 19:7](#): *For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe* ([Deuteronomy 10:17](#)).

b. **But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him:** Peter’s point was not to imply that men like Cornelius were already right with God and don’t need to become Christians. Instead, the point is that they need not feel excluded from God because of their national background.

i. We often think God sees color; He only sees the heart. God does not see economic status; He only sees the heart. He doesn’t see nationality or ethnic group; He only sees the heart.

c. **He is Lord of all:** This is a powerful phrase, showing the deity of Jesus. Peter could never say this if Jesus were not (and is not) God. Furthermore, **He is Lord of all** – meaning both Jew and Gentile.

d. **Whom they killed by hanging on a tree...Him God raised up on the third day:**

Notably, Peter’s preaching to the Gentiles was essentially the same as his preaching to

the Jews. He presented the person and work of Jesus Christ, with an emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus and our responsibility before God in light of these things.

i. Peter didn't have one sermon for one group and another sermon for another. *All* people needed to be saved by coming to a living faith in a living Jesus Christ.

ii. Peter's sermon was a wonderful (if brief and perhaps condensed by Luke) explanation of the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth:

- Jesus was baptized in identification with humanity.
- Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power.
- Jesus went about doing good and healing, delivering those oppressed by the devil.
- Jesus did this with the power of God, for God was with Him.
- Jesus did these things in the presence of eyewitnesses.
- Jesus was crucified.
- Jesus was raised from the dead, resurrected in view of many witnesses.
- Jesus commanded His followers to preach the message of who He is and what He did.
- Jesus is ordained by God to be Judge of the entire world.
- Jesus is the one foretold by the prophets.

iii. **Even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead:** "Peter stresses eating and drinking with Christ because that is a way of saying that Christ's was a real resurrection." (Boice)

iv. **He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead:** "The apostle was not long in his address before he came to the doctrine of the judgment of all men by Jesus Christ. He says that he was commanded to preach it, and therefore he did preach it." (Spurgeon)

e. **Whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins:** The brief sermon concluded with an understanding of the *broadness* of God's promise of salvation. Note it carefully: **Whoever believes!** Jew or Gentile; slave or free; white or black; good or wicked; rich or poor – **whoever believes.**

5. (44-48) God-fearing Gentiles are filled with the Holy Spirit and baptized.

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who

have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

a. **While Peter was still speaking these words:** Salvation came when each one of these Gentiles responded to Peter's message with believing faith in their hearts, so that they were actually born again as they listened and believed. "Oh that the Spirit of God would in the same manner interrupt us!" (Spurgeon)

i. While listening to Peter, these people made a *secret* and *invisible* transaction in their hearts with God, by setting their faith in Jesus Christ.

ii. The moment of a person's salvation isn't necessarily when they raise a hand or come forward at an evangelistic invitation. It is more likely at the moment they surrender to God and embrace with trust Jesus in the sincerity of their hearts.

iii. Peter allowed the Holy Spirit to interrupt his sermon. The Holy Spirit was doing the greater work in the hearts of those listening, and Peter went with the flow. He stopped and called for their baptism.

iv. These were likely not the first Gentiles to trust in Jesus and be born again. Gentiles had probably received salvation in the eight years since Pentecost ([Acts 2](#)). But those Gentiles were saved as they embraced Judaism as well as Christianity. Gentiles may have received salvation before this, but they were saved as Jews, not as Gentiles.

v. All before this, a Gentile could certainly trust in Jesus as Messiah and receive the forgiveness of sins that Jesus won for them at the cross. Yet in doing so, he would first have to become a Jew – and then continue on in the Jewish ritual law. They would wear certain coverings for their head in church, they would eat only kosher foods, they would make pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the feasts, and they would observe dozens of ceremonial laws and rituals.

b. **The Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word... they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God:** Their filling with the Holy Spirit was accompanied by the demonstration of spiritual gifts. This was a filling with the Holy Spirit in two senses: First, in the sense that He indwells and abides in every believer; second, in the sense of a special empowering with gifts and graces from the Holy Spirit.

i. When they spoke with tongues, it was to **magnify God**, not to teach men. The audience was God, not man, as is consistent with the principle of [1 Corinthians 14:2](#).

ii. This was unique. It was not common in the Book of Acts or in subsequent Christian experience for those who were not previously converted (born again) to instantly be born again and receive such evident spiritual gifts. Yet it was good and even necessary on this occasion, to show that they received *the exact same Spirit, the exact same blessing* as the apostles and first followers of Jesus did on the morning of Pentecost ([Acts 2](#)).

iii. "The Gentiles are brought into an exactly parallel position, not merely with normal Jews (or even Samaritans) who had believed on Jesus, but with the apostles themselves." (Boice)

c. **Those of the circumcision who believed were astonished:** The Jewish Christians present were amazed. They may have understood that God was now starting to love the Gentiles, but who would have thought God would fill Gentiles with the Holy Spirit in the same manner and degree as the Jews?

i. Peter made the point clearly when he noted that they **received the Holy Spirit just as we have**. It wasn't just that God loved or blessed the Gentiles that **astonished** them. It was that God loved and blessed the Gentiles just as He loved and blessed the Jews, and He did it *while they were still Gentiles*.

d. **He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord:** This showed their full acceptance into the community of those who followed Jesus. Their baptism showed they were accepted as Gentile followers of Jesus.

i. This entrance of Gentiles into the church was not a new plan, but something promised long before. The Old Testament looked for the day when a light would shine in the darkness of the Gentile world: *Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.* ([Isaiah 60:1-3](#))

ii. God promised Abraham and his descendants that the blessing that came through him would extend to all nations ([Genesis 12:1-4](#)). Here, we see Jesus – the greatest blessing from Abraham – extended to the nations.

iii. Remember Jesus' promise of *other sheep, not of this fold* in [John 10:16](#). Jesus also promised, *if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself* ([John 12:32](#)).

iv. The first Gentile Jesus dealt with in His public ministry was a Roman centurion from Capernaum. When Jesus healed that centurion's servant, He declared *that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven* ([Matthew 8:5-13](#)).

v. We should also see that Cornelius was an undoubtedly good man; yet he needed Jesus. Even good people, who are respectful towards God, still need to come to Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and put all their trust in who Jesus is and what He did for them.

¹ *At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment.* ² *He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he*

gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. ³ One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, “Cornelius!”

⁴ Cornelius stared at him in fear. “What is it, Lord?” he asked. The angel answered, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. ⁵ Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.”

⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. ⁸ He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

Tonight we’ll pick up the story in v9

Peter’s Vision

⁹ About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. ¹³ Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

¹⁴ “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

¹⁷ While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon’s house was and stopped at the gate. ¹⁸ They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

¹⁹ While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”

²¹ Peter went down and said to the men, “I’m the one you’re looking for. Why have you come?”

²² The men replied, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.” ²³ Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

As we unpack this, we see another example of God doing what only He can do...masterfully craft a matrix of two lives colliding.

Have you ever experienced that? Our lives are like tapestries being woven by a master...each going our own way and fulfilling a purpose...and then boom, two tapestries collide. Coincidence? Or a greater purpose?

And that’s what we see here. God met with Cornelius and spoke to him, he sent messengers to find Peter, and *meanwhile*...God spoke to Peter.

That word “meanwhile” explains a lot in the kingdom of God.

We have to remember...*Nothing takes God by surprise.*

He is not bound to space and time like we are. He sees events before they happen.

How can that be? I can’t get my mind around that. But it’s true, none the less.

Look at a few scriptures that discuss this idea:

Deuteronomy 31:8

⁸ *The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”*

Isaiah 65:24

²⁴ *Before they call I will answer;
while they are still speaking I will hear.*

Psalm 139:4

*⁴ Before a word is on my tongue
you, LORD, know it completely.*

Luke 18:27

²⁷ Jesus replied, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."

This idea that nothing takes God by surprise brings great comfort, and indeed we can say "meanwhile God"...

A pandemic hit our world, *meanwhile* God...

The country is in unrest and divided like never before, *meanwhile*...

Sickness strikes our families...

Financial hardship...

Marital division...

You name it, and God has already been there!

Whatever the hardship, God has already gone ahead and worked out a plan.

Don't give up!

And here, tonight in our story in Acts 10, we see this happening.

God intended this unlikely man named Cornelius, a gentile...a Roman...and Roman centurion...to have a life-changing experience through the Holy Spirit...so He tells Him to send for Peter. *Meanwhile, 35 miles away...God puts Peter in a trance-like state in order to appear to him and give him instruction.*

Meanwhile, God...only God can do that!

That brings us to the next question. *Why all the hubbub about telling Peter to meet with Cornelius by giving him this vision of animals?*

Well, there was intentionality here...

.¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. ¹³ Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

In this vision, Peter saw all kinds of animals...four-footed animals, reptiles, birds...kosher and non-kosher...

Peter was a Jew. And the Old Testament Law of Moses dictated what was clean and unclean in God’s eyes for His people. That included animals that were OK to eat and animals that weren’t OK to eat.

This explains the significance of Peter’s hesitation to eat...

Some of these animals were unclean...so he tells God

¹⁴ “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

Good old Peter...he had a habit of telling God no.

God had a greater purpose here. God’s original purpose for the Jews...

But when Jesus came and bore our sins on the cross...when He said those life-giving 3 words “it is finished”...the barriers were removed...the Jews were no longer separated from the other people...we were now all grafted into the family of God.

Ephesians 2:12-22

¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Peter, though He was saved and filled with the Spirit, did not understand that yet.

The walls were about to come down like never before so that indeed, Jesus' great commandment of going into all the world could begin to happen.

Peter was putting God in a box, limited His power, based on his own traditions...God would not be put in a box. In fact, He was about to drop a grenade in that box. Notice the text says this interaction between God and Peter happened three times. I think God was making a point!

And again, why is this? Why did God go to all the trouble of appearing to Peter in this vision?

John 3:16

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

As we begin to unpack this, let's look at v1, where we notice something very interesting about the next character in the story.

¹ At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment.

Cornelius was a Roman. Let's just start with that. And he was an officer in the Roman army with 100 men under him, thus a centurion.

Caesarea was a Judean city under Roman control. Point is...there is intentionality here. Systematically, we see the Holy Spirit choosing to have encounters with the unlikeliest people. Whether it's a sorcerer, an Ethiopian official, a Jewish zealot responsible for the persecution and death of many early Christians, or...tonight, a Roman Centurion who, just by nature of his identity, would've been feared and hated by the Jews.

This shows yet again God's love for all people. And His desire for all people to be saved.

2 Peter 3:9

⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Romans 2:11

¹¹ For God does not show favoritism.

And as we will find tonight and next time...this story of Cornelius highlights this fact:

God does not show favoritism.

He loves all people equally and wants all to come to be in union with Him through repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

But as we know...all people will not. God gives us a choice.

Jesus said:

Matthew 7:13-14

¹³ *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*

In v13, Jesus says it is up to us. He will not force us to come.

God created us for union with us, but gave us free will.

He wants us to come of our own volition (choice). It requires action on our part. Here is another example. Look at the action points described here:

Romans 10:9-13

⁹ *If you **declare** with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and **believe** in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you **believe** and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you **profess** your faith and are saved. ¹¹ As Scripture says, “Anyone who **believes** in him will never be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who **call** on him, ¹³ for, “Everyone who **calls** on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

Declare, believe, profess, call – action words requiring choice

If you are not sure where you stand with the Lord, why not make sure now?

And also notice in v12

” ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him

No favoritism. In God’s eyes, we are the same. It is the same Lord of all who richly blesses all who call on Him.

And that includes a Roman centurion.

Now notice something else interesting about this Roman centurion:

² He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.

He and all his family were devout and God-fearing

What does that mean?

Devout: *having a deep religious feeling or commitment.*

But also notice it says *and God-fearing.*

Reminds me of what it said about the church in Acts 9

Acts 9:31

³¹ Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

**Now there's a recipe for a thriving and growing church: *The fear of the Lord and being encouraged by the Holy Spirit!*
(*comforted...led...empowered...infilled...*)**

Expand on fear of the Lord for a church, home, marriage, business

And here, tonight, we see that this Roman centurion was known and referred to as a devout man who feared the Lord.

Let that be said about me!

But also notice the sentence structure of v2:

² He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.

It makes the statement about Cornelius. Then there is a semi-colon, which joins two independent clauses that could stand alone, yet complement each other.

In other words...he was a God fearing man, and here's what that means:

he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.

Expand on

And then notice...with all this being said about Cornelius, because of these traits, he was positioned for a God-encounter.

I addressed this recently:

How do we make these moments happen? Do we make these moments happen? Can they be manufactured, as it were?

We position ourselves for God moments by walking in obedience.

And that's exactly what we see in Cornelius. Let's look at that encounter...

³ *One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"*

⁴ *Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. ⁵ Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."*

⁷ *When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. ⁸ He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.*

Unpack

Peter's Vision

⁹ About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. ¹³ Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

¹⁴ "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

¹⁷ While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. ¹⁸ They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

¹⁹ While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three^a men are looking for you. ²⁰ So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”

²¹ Peter went down and said to the men, “I’m the one you’re looking for. Why have you come?”

²² The men replied, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.” ²³ Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

Peter at Cornelius’s House

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. ²⁴ The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. ²⁶ But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.”

²⁷ While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸ He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”

³⁰ Cornelius answered: “Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me ³¹ and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. ³² Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’ ³³ So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. ³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and

how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

³⁹ "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, ⁴⁰ but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. ⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in tongues^[a] and praising God.

Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." ⁴⁸ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

³² *As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda. ³³ There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. ³⁴ "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. ³⁵ All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.*

³⁶ *In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷ About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. ³⁸ Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"*

³⁹ *Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.*

⁴⁰ *Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes,*

and seeing Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. ⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

For the past few weeks we have focused on Saul/Paul. We saw his amazing conversion and the launching of his ministry. First in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and beyond. Meanwhile, as we will recall, there were the other apostles that we studied in the earlier chapters of Acts. Where were they this whole time we were talking about Saul? Were they on a break because this scene didn't include their character? Hardly...as we see in Acts, *God is really good at multi-tasking.*

He can be fully engaged in my life...leading me...using me...speaking to me...healing me...loving on me...and all the while, He is doing the same with someone else.

God is omnipresent – which means *His presence transcends natural boundaries. He is fully present everywhere, all the time.* While God is doing amazing things with Saul, he is also doing amazing things with Peter.

i.e. Saul and Peter didn't split God's time 50/50

They each had the *full* empowerment and leading of the Holy Spirit

They each had all of God! I think that's pretty cool.

So we now flip the spotlight back to Peter tonight. As he is traveling around the region he comes to Lydda, a small city about 35 miles from Jerusalem. He sees a man who is paralyzed and has been bedridden for 8 years. *And he immediately realizes it's a God moment. (Peter realized he was in a "God moment".)*

Have you ever experienced a God moment?

Here, Peter clearly realizes God has ordained this moment, and speaks with authority to the man to be healed in the name of Jesus Christ.

Notice that...there was no long, drawn out prayer.

He simply saw that it was God's intent to heal this man and so he spoke it with the authority of heaven!

Sounds awesome. Sign me up! I want God moments like that, don't you?

So how do we make these moments happen? *Do* we make these moments happen? Can they be manufactured, as it were?

We position ourselves for God moments by walking in obedience.

(tell story of Santa Barbara) Someone once said...

"Great moves of God are usually preceded by simple acts of obedience."
Steven Furtick

And that is what we see in Peter. Whether it is Peter walking into the temple gates with John for afternoon prayer and running into a man born lame, or Peter walking into a little town called Lydda and encountering a paralyzed man...or Peter crossing paths with a lady named Tabitha who had died...he positioned himself for these moments by walking in obedience, filled with, and led by the Holy Spirit...that is what positioned him for these awesome God moments. It wasn't his training or credentials. Remember, he was an ordinary unschooled man.

God is more interested in our availability than our ability.

And what are these God moments all about? To give us goose bumps? To make us feel more spiritual?

God moments are meant for Kingdom purposes.

When these moments happen, someone is effected...someone notices...and you can bet, *When a God moment happens, the Holy Spirit has already started working on someone's heart.*

That's what He does...He goes ahead and begins to prepare the heart of that person like a farmer prepares a field for seed. Look at the text we read:

Regarding the paralyzed man that was healed:

³⁵ All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

Regarding the dead women that was brought to life:

⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.

That is what it's about...adding to the Kingdom.

Do you want to know what is on the heart of God in 2020?....

Well, wait a minute Pastor. Does that mean that God didn't heal that paralyzed man for his sake...or make that dead women live again for her sake?

Ripple Effect of Healing

²³ After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, ²⁴ but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. ²⁵ But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

²⁶ When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews,^[a] but they tried to kill him. ³⁰ When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

³¹ Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

As we unpack this, we immediately see one of the benefits of being a believer. God promises to protect us. How does He protect us? One of the ways is by foiling the plans of the enemy. Look at this in vv23-25

²³ After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, ²⁴ but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. ²⁵ But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

This is the classic scene...the enemy plotting against God's people. But God frustrated and foiled their plans. It says Saul learned of their plan. So how did he learn about this? Did he have a special team of undercover operatives? Did he have bugs planted around the city recording conversations? Did he have hidden cameras?

No...even better than that...he had the Holy Spirit fighting for him.

(And) A *believer and the Holy Spirit make a majority every time. God was fighting for Saul's cause. God was protecting him.*

Job 5:12

¹² *He thwarts the plans of the crafty,
so that their hands achieve no success.*

Psalms 33:10

¹⁰ *The LORD foils the plans of the nations;
he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.*

Question: Do you believe God still does that today in our lives?

That is exactly what Jesus Himself prayed for us:

John 17:15

¹⁵ *My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.*

God promises to protect us if we will only call on Him.

So instead of freaking out, our response should be to call out to His name!

It's actually very good news that God fights for us...because *God always wins!*

Psalm 5:11

*¹¹ But let all who take refuge in you be glad;
let them ever sing for joy.*

*Spread your protection over them,
that those who love your name may rejoice in you.*

2 Thessalonians 3:3

³ But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.

Let's move on:

Acts 9:26-28

²⁶ When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

So Saul went back to Jerusalem. This was a big deal...if you'll recall, it all started in Jerusalem:

Acts 7:54-60

The Stoning of Stephen

⁵⁴ When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

And then in Chapter 8:1-3

¹ *And Saul approved of their killing him.*

The Church Persecuted and Scattered

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

This is the same Saul. So, I can understand why the disciples there in Jerusalem were afraid of him. Perhaps it's a trick...he's a wolf in sheep's clothing...and by the way, the bible tells us to be weary of those types:

Did you know there are wolves in sheep's clothing today? They even show up in the church...perhaps even pose as Christian leaders.

Matthew 7:15

True and False Prophets

¹⁵ *“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.*

So how do we know how to spot one? How do we know the difference? It takes prayer...discernment from the Holy Spirit. You also must look at the fruit. Remember, the fruit of the Spirit:

Galatians 5:22-23

²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

If you have the Spirit in you, leading you, changing you...this is how it will bear fruit. This will be the evidence.

Also – I look for pride or humility...

So, does the Bible have anything to say about how to test a person to see if they are a prophet?

Deuteronomy 18:22

²² *If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed.*

1 John 4:1

¹ *Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

Back to the text. In the case of Saul here in our story, Barnabas came to his defense and took him to see the apostles. He told them of Saul's experience on the Damascus road – how Jesus Christ Himself confronted Saul and revealed Himself. He told the apostles of the power with which Saul spoke the gospel message. So Saul was allowed to hang out with them and he moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking with power about Jesus Christ.

It occurred to me: *What if Barnabas hadn't spoken up?*

It is so important in the church to have others bear witness to our calling. Otherwise, it could indeed be a free-for-all.

Let's finish:

Acts 9:29-30

²⁹ *He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him.* ³⁰ *When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.*

The Hellenistic Jews were the Jews that were influenced by the Greek culture. Obviously, they weren't buying anything Saul was selling, and tried to kill him. Once again, God protected him. This time by moving him out to Tarsus.

As I wrapped up preparation for tonight's study, something occurred to me:

Acts 9:1

¹ *Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.*

Acts 9:22

²² Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

Look at that...21 verses later in the same chapter. God is not bound by time or space. He can do anything. Some of us may take longer than 21 verses -as it were- but God knows what it will take, and He will not give up on us!

And as we close:

Acts 9:31

³¹ Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

**Now there's a recipe for a thriving and growing church: *The fear of the Lord and being encouraged by the Holy Spirit!*
(comforted...led...empowered...infilled...)**

Acts 9:17-19

¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Acts 9:20-22

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰ At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹ All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" ²² Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

As I unpacked this I immediately noticed something...Look at verse 20

20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God

This struck me as amazing. Here is Saul, the arch nemesis of the church...the main instigator of the persecution of the church...personally responsible for the imprisonment and even death of many early Christians...guilty, guilty, guilty! He's got to pay!

But Jesus Himself has an encounter with Saul on the road to Damascus and changes him. There is a time of repentance and humbling for Saul...I mean, he was struck blind for a while and didn't eat for days. But then Ananias lays hands on him and he is healed and filled with the Spirit. He can now see again and has his appetite back, OK, fine. But after what he'd done, surely he had to pay, right? I mean surely there was a time where he was ostracized from the other Christians...surely there was a cooling off period...surely God needed time to get over it, right?

No, you don't see any of that from God. Instead it says

20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God

Expand on

When God forgives us – He frees us

There is no waiting period...cooling off period

It reminds me of the old song "What Sin?"

*It happened so long ago. I cried out for mercy back then
I plead the blood of Jesus, begged him to forgive my sin
But I still can't forget it...it just won't go away
So I wept again, "Lord wash my sin,"
But this is all He'd say*

(chorus)

What sin, what sin?

*That's as far away as the east is from the west
What sin, what sin?
It was gone the very minute you confessed
Buried in the sea of forgetfulness*

*The heaviest thing you'll carry is a load of guilt and shame
You were never meant to bear them
So let them go in Jesus' name
Our God is slow to anger, quick to forgive our sin
So let Him put them under the blood
Don't bring them up again... 'cause He'll just say*

We make mistakes...we come to God for forgiveness. He *does* forgive. But sometimes we feel we need to pay some more...we feel like we don't deserve to be free...too much shame...too much guilt...*how can I enjoy freedom after what I've done?*

Listen: You are holding yourself to a standard that God Himself isn't holding you to!

We play God when we won't allow ourselves to feel free because of our past.

Galatians 5:1

¹ It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

And it was for freedom the Christ set Saul free. But it was also so he could go out and preach the message that he once tried to squash. *Out of our greatest mistakes can come our greatest ministry opportunities!*

OK, so that's how Jesus saw the situation. But were the people immediately on board with this sudden change?

²¹ All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?"

An understandable reaction. I think I would have said the same thing. After all, that is what Saul had done in the past. Wasn't it reasonable to assume he was there to do it again?

After all, a leopard can't change its spots, right?

We must understand...*Saul didn't change himself. Jesus changed him.*

And it is the same for us...we don't have the ability to change ourselves.

We can't change who we are, we can only change what we do.

Change – true change – is God territory...

Jeremiah 17:14

*¹⁴ Heal me, LORD, and I will be healed;
save me and I will be saved,
for you are the one I praise.*

Notice it doesn't say *Show me how to heal myself, and I'll be healed...just give me a list of some things I can do...*

In fact, the Bible even addresses our condition when we try to cover our wounds and heal ourselves.

Jeremiah 6:14

*¹⁴ They dress the wound of my people
as though it were not serious.
'Peace, peace,' they say,
when there is no peace.*

So what are some ways we try to heal ourselves? (discuss)

These will never work...not in a true lasting way...they were never meant to...they are bandaids...dressing for a wound...but there is no true inner healing...no real change

There is a difference in changing what we do and changing who we are.

When we change as a Christian, it is never because of our stellar behavior or our hard work. It is solely because of God's grace, and His presence in us.

i.e. *The fruit of God's presence is change*

That's just the way it is...if we will spend time in His presence, if we will get in His Word, meditate on it...we will change. We have no choice. No one in the gospels who encountered Jesus left the same way.

The bottom line: *Grace changes us (or at least it is supposed to)*

Paul (the same man as called Saul in our story) talked about fruit in Galatians 5. Specifically, the *Fruit of the Spirit*.

This word "fruit" indicates something...remember, intentionality... what this is saying is...*if you have the Spirit in you, leading you, changing you...this is how it will bear fruit. This will be the evidence.*

Let's read about it. Galatians 5:22-23

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Get that: *Against such things there is no law.*

i.e. these are much more important than just keeping the rules. (Paul should know)

Why is rule keeping (the law) so attractive? Because it doesn't require that we really change anything on the inside. It just requires that we work at doing the right things. *It doesn't require surrender...it doesn't require vulnerability.*

That's why legalism is attractive...it puts confidence in the flesh.

It becomes about what we can do to show God we are spiritual...it becomes something we can control. *There is no intimacy with God and therefore no change.*

With legalism, we can dispense our own spirituality.

And that's exactly what Saul had done prior to the Damascus road encounter.

He was really good at keeping the law...so good that he would kill for what he thought was right.

But if we are truly changed by God's grace, and the Spirit is in us and leading us...we will bear fruit. *There will be evidence.*

Did Saul display any fruit? Was there any evidence of the Spirit in him?

²² Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

I tell you guys...*Few things will baffle people like a changed life!*

When you are changed and truly living it, your changed life is enough to get people's attention.

earlier in the Book of Acts it said he was breathing threats

Gratitude is important. *Gratitude changes everything.*

Tonight we are going to focus our attention outward rather than inward. We have taken many steps on our road to recovery. Our first step was to admit that we were (and are) powerless. Our second step led us to choose, once and for all, a power by which to live. We took our third and most important step when we chose to turn our lives and wills over to the only true Higher Power, Jesus Christ.

As we continue our journey, we grow in our conscious contact with God and He begins to unfold in our lives. And, as we begin to grow in our understanding of Him, we begin to live out the decision we made in Principle 3. We keep walking now, in peace, as we maintain inventories on a regular basis and as we continue to deepen our relationship with Christ. The way we do this according to step 11, is to “seek through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God” This requires focusing on Him by praying and meditating.

Prayer is talking to God. Meditation is listening to God on a daily basis. When we meditate we aren’t talking about some yoga-type position or murmur, “om, om, om.” We simply focus on and think about God or a certain Scripture verse or maybe even just one or two words...words such as “gratitude.”

We need to do this every day. But, if we’re honest, we don’t. Our minds tend to wander and we find it very difficult to concentrate. Those old familiar distractions come back. You know, that old familiar committee of past dysfunction. The

committee will try to do everything it can to interrupt my quiet time with God. Through daily working the principles to the best of my ability, however, I've learned to shut them up most of the time.

I've learned to listen to God, who tells me that I have great worth. And He will say the same to you—if you will listen.

Gratitude

This week I suggest that your prayers be focused on your gratitude in three areas of your life: toward God, others, and to your recovery.

Having an attitude of gratitude is more than something we do around Thanksgiving.

Someone once said "Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow." -- Melody Beattie

First, for what are you thankful to *God*? Offer prayers of gratitude to your Creator.

The psalms are chock full of reminders to *Give thanks to the Lord...His love endures forever.*

In Philippians 4:6, we're told, *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."* Did you notice that? *with thanksgiving*

Psalm 107:15 encourages us to *"give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and wonderful deeds for mankind."* What wonderful deeds they are! What are at least two areas of your life in which you can see God's work and that you are thankful for this holiday season?

You can reflect on the last eleven months or on what God has done for you this week or even today. Then take a moment to list just a few of the special things for which you are thankful to your Higher Power.

The next area is to list the individuals that God has placed in your life to walk alongside you on your road of recovery. We need to be thankful for *others*.

“Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the word of Christ—the message—have the run of the house” (Colossians 3:15–16, MSG).

Who are you thankful for? Why? Take a moment to list them.

The third area we can be thankful for is our *recovery*.

“As for us, we have this large crowd of witnesses around us. So then, let us rid ourselves of everything that gets in the way, and the sin which holds on to us so tightly, and let us run with determination the race that lies before us” (Hebrews 12:1, GNB).

What are two recent growth areas of your recovery for which you are thankful? This brings me back to the notion of grace and how it ties in with our gratitude.

Gratitude and grace work together.

Grace: Freely given, unmerited favor of God

When you mix an intentional attitude of gratitude with God’s unmerited favor – suddenly the unbearable becomes bearable

Embracing gratitude in the face of opposition requires that we embrace grace.

Guys, the bottom line is:

Gratitude is intentional...it takes conscious effort.

Gratitude brings you back to the moment.

Wrap-up

Let’s close in prayer.

Dear God, help me set aside all the hassles and noise of the world to focus and listen just to You for the next few minutes. Help me get to know You better. Help me to better understand Your plan, Your purpose for my life. Father, help me live within today, seeking Your will and living this day as You would have me.

It is my prayer to have others see me as Yours; not just in my words but more importantly, in my actions. Thank You for Your love, Your grace, Your perfect forgiveness. Thank You for all those You have placed in my life, for my program, my recovery, and most of all, for You and Your love for me. Your will be done, not mine. In Your Son's name I pray, Amen.

Principle 7b Testimony

My name is Brett and I am a believer in Christ who struggles with issues commonly shared by children of alcoholics and other addicts.

I grew up in a rural community in the heartland of America. My parents were farmers throughout the majority of their adolescent and adult years. As a result, a strong, almost compulsive, work ethic was ingrained in the family. Unfortunately, another component was introduced into this family dynamic as well. I am not sure if initially this component was added to aid in relaxation, to help forget about a multitude of heartaches and setbacks associated with the farm, or to simply be a portion of the social setting after a hard day's work. I do know that the alcohol grew to become a substitute for interaction with the family members, to block intimacy in communication, and to anesthetize the pain and disappointments of life.

Looking back, I believe my dad often had a drink to break away from the perfectionism and performance issues that nagged at him as a result of growing up as the youngest child in a single-parent home with his father and four sisters. Even though I only spent my first four years on the farm, the behavior from that environment continued to manifest itself in our next residence. Oftentimes, when people hear the term "alcoholic" they think of a person who misses work and is passed out with a brown bag in his or her hand. On the contrary, my alcoholic

parent was quite functional, never missed work, and was very financially responsible.

The primary issue was that Dad would either check out emotionally or become easily agitated when he would drink. I can clearly remember the sound of Dad's opening the refrigerator door in the basement, knowing that the next action would be the consumption of a shot or two of whiskey, directly off the bottle, followed by a beer. The audible cues signaled that it was time to give Dad his space—and plenty of it—to avoid conflict at any cost and to keep him happy. The result would translate into what I thought was a normal evening. Mom made every effort to run interference and to help avoid conflict. At the same time, however, she enabled Dad's behavior.

As the years passed, I did everything I knew to please others, avoid conflict, and excel to receive recognition. I was a member of many clubs in high school and college, received honors, awards, grades, and so forth, but I was never content. This performance-oriented behavior continued into my professional life as my career took off. However, the motivation for my success was not healthy. I was still trying to continue to please an unpleaseable parent even beyond the years of his life on earth.

During my years of scholastic and professional success, I egotistically took all the credit. It never crossed my mind that all of my talents, health, capabilities, and so forth were a gift from God. I did not realize they were a gift until I began to abuse and, to a degree, lose them. You see, even though work and school came easily, I always, always struggled with relationships.

During my second marriage, I was having a very difficult time with my stepdaughter. I was not sensitive to her needs, nor did I provide time for her. I visited a therapist and came to understand the issues were tied to my background as an ACA.

Five years of therapy helped my understanding academically, but in the deepest parts of my soul I knew something was missing ... but I couldn't understand what. About that same time my wife, Cindi, suggested that we attend Saddleback Easter

services at Trabuco Hills High School. Reluctantly, I agreed and continued to visit for the next two months. At the end of each service I would argue with Cindi about the message and its content. I was not about to succumb to admitting that I needed God. I was convinced I could handle anything the world could dole out. Meanwhile, my life went into a tailspin. I could no longer juggle the spinning plates; my stepparenting skills failed, I had pneumonia for three months, we were pinched financially, and I was stressed out about my job.

During a Sunday service about this time a new pastor was introduced who was leading a recovery ministry. At that moment I was convicted even deeper by God that I had been on the wrong path. I met John Baker and started my next five years with Celebrate Recovery. This time Christ was my Higher Power. I worked the steps as diligently, and if the truth be known, as compulsively as my little ACA legs would carry me. Seriously though, as I worked the steps, layers of hidden issues slowly began to be peeled back to reveal more to me. As I proceeded through the steps I reached Step 11, the step that reads, “We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and power to carry that out.” The 11th step was the fuel I needed to accept two things. First, that God would provide the peace and means to guide me and help me accept that my recovery is a lifelong process; and secondly, that He would always be there for me to talk to, to listen to, to be loved by, and to love back. All of these concepts were difficult for me because all of my life I was trying to *earn* things—approval, recognition, trust, forgiveness, and so forth. This step provided all of those things and more as long as I was obedient to have conscious contact with God.

As I took spiritual maturity classes at Saddleback, I came to understand that a daily quiet time was important if I was to grow in my relationship with my Higher Power, Jesus Christ. By reading God’s Word and spending time in prayer, my intimacy with and understanding of His will became more clear. I began to claim that I am His child, that He loves me unconditionally, that I am forgiven, and that I cannot earn His love.

Working Step 11 also has helped me to develop patience, because God is teaching me to be still and listen, to wait on Him and to trust that He will provide *all* my needs. He helps me to know that I need to let go of my will and to seek out His will—that He is in control and I’m not. What a relief! In the quiet, still moments He helps me see all the things that have happened in my life to bring me to this moment today with you. I never knew He was so near and that I was so far away until I began to work the 11th step. It is my prayer that each of you will continue with this step that is challenged by all of the barking dogs, doorbells, errands, wandering thoughts, and diversions that the world places in our way. Throughout this step I have come to claim Philippians 4:13 (NCV) as my life verse: “I can do all things through Christ, because he gives me strength.” May you also allow Him to strengthen you.

Discuss Ananias.

So let’s take a look at this scene. Several things going on.

First, notice it says *Placing his hands on Saul*

What is that about?

Well, first of all, remember that Saul is still temporarily blind. He could not see Ananias’ face or his expression. Surely there was a little angst in the moment...considering all the nasty things Saul had done to the church over the years. Would this be a good time for revenge? It would probably be justified, at least on a human level. And what about Ananias...can you imagine his internal struggle with this?

But we get a clue in v10 about Ananias and what enabled him to do this:

¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

It says he was a disciple. This early church was a disciple factory! I would love to be a part of a church like that...*making disciples!*

Acts 6:7 When the church began to explode:

⁷ So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly...

With the church operating efficiently and in unity, with everyone engaged and serving in their calling...the Word of God was spreading. This is how a church is supposed to operate. And notice, it says the number of disciples increased rapidly. Notice it doesn't just say the number of *converts*.

What is the difference between a convert and a disciple?

Well, a convert is simply that...a person who has converted. A person who has believed in Jesus Christ as their Savior. That's wonderful...congratulations. But that's just the beginning.

A disciple is a follower or student of a teacher or leader. And in this case, it is a person who has believed in Jesus Christ as their Savior, and then has decided to follow Him and study His teachings... it means we want to put His word into action by striving to live the way He wants us to live. In other words, someone who wants to make Jesus not *only their Savior, but their Lord...Lord of their life! In full submission!*

Think about romantic relationships...Can you imagine saying you have fallen in love with someone without getting to know them? Or – can you imagine giving up all that you are and following someone blindly without knowing anything about them? It is the same way in being a Christian.

To know Jesus is to love Him. And we know Him by spending time in His Word and in His presence.

And getting back to our story tonight with Ananias: God asked him to do a pretty amazing thing...reaching out to a hated and feared enemy of the

church. I thought to myself...what would I do if God asked me to show mercy to someone I hate...especially these days...

Last week I asked:

What do we do when God asks something that doesn't make sense? Obey!

So Ananias obeyed, and he laid his hand on Saul.

Laying on of hands while praying is about empowering the person with blessing, authority, and power. It was also done during commissioning of a person for service.

We saw this in Acts 6 when it was time to appoint the 7 leaders of the church who would help the apostles with the administration duties:

Acts 6:5-6

⁵ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

This idea goes back all the way to the Exodus when God told Moses how to prepare the Levites for service in the temple.

Numbers 8:10

¹⁰ You are to bring the Levites before the LORD, and the Israelites are to lay their hands on them.

This is a serious thing. Look how Paul warned Timothy:

1 Timothy 4:14

¹⁴ Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

So Ananias laid his hand on Saul, breaching the gap...breaking the silence...speaking volumes with the trusting touch of his hand...laying his

hands on Saul and by doing so, imparting a powerful anointing on Saul's life and ministry. *This was real and this was powerful!*

And then notice, v17

"Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

This laying on of hands in prayer not only commissioned Saul for a powerful ministry, but brought healing.

¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again.

Oh, that we could be a part of a powerful church operating in the gifts of the Spirit...signs and wonders...healings...physical healings...emotional...spiritual...

And also notice, v17 says not only *healing*, but:

and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

This was a necessary step in the commissioning of Saul. Being filled with the Spirit...emptying himself to be filled with power from on high...to do what he wouldn't have been able to do on his own!

Reminds me of what Jesus did for His disciples when He appeared to them after His resurrection:

John 20:19-22

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

To explain this, let's first establish this: As believers, the Holy Spirit is in us

1 Corinthians 6:19

¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own

When we became believers, the Holy Spirit moved in and took up residence. Basically.....it's no longer about us!

He is with us and in us, everywhere we go and in each circumstance. No matter what we face, the Holy Spirit is there with us. We are not alone.

But here's the question...is it a one-time thing?

Ephesians 5:18

¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

The Greek word is *plerousthe*

Present imperative verb meaning "*constantly being filled, or keep being filled*"

Similar to the idea of the sail of a sailboat (show pic):

Sail must be continuously filled with wind to drive the boat

We can say "*Lord, fill my sails today*"

So that's the "in us"...in us as believers...being filled with the Spirit, continually filled with the Spirit...driven by the Spirit

OK, let's get back to the text and finish for tonight:

¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Indeed, God was doing a major "reset" in Saul. Filling him with the Spirit, scales fall off his eyes so he can see again...baptized (speak about baptizing)

And then having a bite to eat to regain his physical strength.

A major reset...body, soul, and spirit. To prepare him for his world-changing ministry.

Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” ²²Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

²³After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, ²⁴but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. ²⁵But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

²⁶When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. ²⁷But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews,^[a] but they tried to kill him. ³⁰When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

³¹Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

¹ *Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"*

⁵ *"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.*

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

The first thing I want point out tonight is the fact that Jesus made this personal. Notice what He says to Saul in v4:

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ *"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.*

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

Notice Jesus is saying Saul was persecuting *Him*.

Wait...persecuting *Jesus*? If you recall, Acts chapter 8 starts with the death of Stephen, the first church martyr, and then it says:

¹ *...On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.*

Notice it says *great persecution broke out against the church*

It doesn't say *persecution broke out against Jesus*

And besides, Jesus wasn't even here on earth in human form anymore, He had ascended to Heaven. *So what is going on here?*

Jesus is making it personal. He is saying He was fully aware of the persecution His church was enduring...He knew the man who was one of the biggest instigators of it (Saul)...and He was saying “*When you persecute my church, you persecute Me*”

Question: *Do you believe Jesus is aware of what His church is enduring today? Is He aware of the cultural sway that is taking place, watering down the truth of His Word to make it more culturally relevant and politically correct?*

**Let me take it a step further and make it more personal:
*Is Jesus aware of your struggles? Is He aware of the problems you face? Is he aware of you?***

In our humanity it is easy to think perhaps God has forgotten us, or maybe doesn't notice what we're going through...maybe we are on our own.

Isaiah 49:14-16

¹⁴ *But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me,
the Lord has forgotten me.”*

¹⁵ *“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast
and have no compassion on the child she has borne?
Though she may forget,
I will not forget you!*

¹⁶ *See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;
your walls are ever before me.*

(Expand on)

David obviously pondered that question and came to this conclusion:

Psalm 139:1-18 (unpack as I read)

¹ *You have searched me, LORD,
and you know me. **You have examined me and know everything!***

² *You know when I sit and when I rise; **my entire life, everything I do**
you perceive my thoughts from afar. **You even know what I am going to think***

³ *You discern my going out and my lying down;*

you are familiar with all my ways.
⁴ *Before a word is on my tongue*
you, LORD, know it completely.
⁵ *You hem me in behind and before,*
*and you lay your hand upon me. **Every moment you know where I am. You know what I am going to say before I even say it. You go before me and follow me...place your hand of blessing on me***
⁶ *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,*
too lofty for me to attain.
⁷ *Where can I go from your Spirit?*
*Where can I flee from your presence? **I can never go where You don't see me***
⁸ *If I go up to the heavens, you are there; **You are everywhere***
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
⁹ *If I rise on the wings of the dawn,*
*if I settle on the far side of the sea, **He uses hyperbole and metaphors***
¹⁰ *even there your hand will guide me,*
your right hand will hold me fast.
¹¹ *If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me*
and the light become night around me,"
¹² *even the darkness will not be dark to you;*
the night will shine like the day,
*for darkness is as light to you. **I can't hide from You, Lord! You see everything!***
¹³ *For you created my inmost being;*
*you knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ **I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;***
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
¹⁵ *My frame was not hidden from you*
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
¹⁶ *Your eyes saw my unformed body;*
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
*before one of them came to be. **Now David says this same God that is all-knowing and ever present...knows all him...this God created him intentionally, with great forethought and care***
¹⁷ *How precious to me are your thoughts, ^[a] God! **(How amazing are your thoughts concerning me)***
How vast is the sum of them!

*¹⁸ Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you.*

These verses leave little doubt that God conceived of us, created us, knows us better than we know ourselves, knows what we are going to do or think before we do or think...goes ahead of us, stays with us, will never leave us...protects us...and never stops thinking about us!

Guys, that is the very definition of making it personal!

Listen:

*Jesus is fully aware of you and your struggles, and He makes it personal.
With my own daughters...you want to come at my daughter you have to come through me!*

Did you know the Bible says in Zechariah 2:8

⁸ ...for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye-

The phrase *apple of my eye* refers to something or someone that one cherishes above all others. Its meaning is derived from an expression signifying the pupil of the eye, one of the most sensitive parts of the body.

Psalm 17:8

*⁸ Keep me as the apple of your eye;
hide me in the shadow of your wings*

So, getting back to our story, Jesus shows up on the Damascus road to interrupt Saul's agenda...to interrupt his life...and says "*I know what you are doing to my church...my people...and what you are doing to them you are doing to me!*"

Let's move on. And then Jesus says:

⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Again, notice Jesus didn't tell him all the details up front. Only the instructions for the day...manna for the day...

⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

Clearly, Saul was being humbled...maybe even humiliated

I heard someone once say “*Humble yourself before the Lord, before you are humiliated.*”

Now notice this. Meanwhile, in Damascus:

¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

¹¹ The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

The Holy Spirit had already gone ahead and prepared a man named Ananias. So while Jesus told Saul to go into town and wait for instructions, the Holy Spirit had already gone into town and told Ananias a man named Saul would be coming into town looking like he needed instruction.

Folks...you can't make this up!

Look at the orchestration...the careful and intentional planning.

Can God do the same in your life? Can He lead you step by step while going ahead of you and preparing your next blessing?

Can He already be preparing the heart of the person you are praying for? Or...Say you desperately need a breakthrough in an area of your life...Can He go ahead and move on the heart of the person that can give you that breakthrough?

Yes! It's miraculous! And only He can do that!

Deuteronomy 31:8

⁸ The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

Let's finish up for tonight, getting back to the text. V13

¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

So obviously, Ananias has apprehension about ministering to Saul. And rightly so. Reminds me of Jonah when God told him to go to Nineveh to preach.

What do we do when God asks something that doesn't make sense?

Obey!

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

God had a plan that made no sense at first glance...to take the greatest enemy of the church and make him His chosen instrument to proclaim the gospel. God can do anything with anyone! We need not question His wisdom or His intentions!

1 Corinthians 1:18

¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:27

²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

Let's finish:

¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the

Holy Spirit.”¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

So we see the commissioning of Saul/Paul the apostle...a major reset

Acts 9:1-19

¹ Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

⁵ “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. ⁶ “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

¹ Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples.

So here’s Saul not only threatening the early Christians, but clearly out to kill them. The story of Saul begins in Acts 7:58 at the scene of the stoning of Stephen.

⁵⁸ ...Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

This is the introduction of Saul, who will also be named *Paul*.

Saul was a young man, in his prime. A member of the Sanhedrin, standing there giving his approval, even holding their coats for them as they stoned Stephen.

Later, he himself said of this scene:

Acts 26:9-11

⁹ “I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord’s people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.

In fact, Acts chapter 8 begins with this regarding the death of Stephen:

Acts 8:1

¹ And Saul approved of their killing him.

This is the concluding comment of the stoning of Stephen in chapter 7. Not only was Saul standing there, allowing this to happen, holding their coats as they stoned Stephen, but he *approved* of it. Another translations says he “agreed with it completely”. It is one thing to hate someone...but to condone murder, and even breathe murderous threats, that takes it to another level.

That is a lot of hate! But get this...This is the same man that Jesus chose to meet in a personal encounter in tonight’s story. Do you know what this tells me? Jesus sees something in each of us that is hidden below the sin, worldliness, and even hatred. No one is so far gone that Jesus can’t pull out the good. As long as someone has breath they can become regenerated...they can be a miracle! And that is what Jesus came to do! *Miracles! Changed lives!*

*I was nothing, before He found me...He has given life to me.
Heartache, broken pieces...ruined lives are why He died on calvary...*

His touch is all I’ve longed for...He was given life to me.

Are you concerned about how this country has turned its back on God? Are you concerned about the hatred and hardness we see in the streets of the cities? Then pray! Jesus can have an encounter with those people just like he did with Saul! If Saul existed today, he might be leading one of the violent movements trying to shutdown religious freedoms. And look...one encounter with Jesus Christ and he was radically changed forever. That same fervor he displayed in his work to shut down the church was used for God’s glory in the explosion of the church throughout the region!

Are you praying for a loved one, and it seems they just get further away from the Lord? Don’t give up! *God never told you to stop praying for the lost.*

God can do anything to reach someone. In this case, Jesus met Saul on a dirt road to Damascus and had an encounter that changed Saul.

So that’s Saul. And before we go any further, let me point out that this scene is what we call a *Christophany*.

Non-physical manifestation of Jesus Christ.

And also...notice the name of the subject here. Saul. I thought he was Paul...Is it Saul, or is it Paul? Well, the answer is...*both*. There is a common misconception that Jesus changed his name to Paul at this encounter, as if there is a *bad Saul* and a *good Paul*.

But note that Jesus Himself called him Saul in His appearance to him...the Lord also used the name Saul when talking to Ananias, who later called him Saul. And notice what the Holy Spirit said later in Acts 13 when appearing to some who were fasting and praying:

Acts 13:2

² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

After his conversion, Paul is still referred to as Saul in the book at Acts almost a dozen more times. I don't want to spend a lot of time on this, but it is interesting none the less. The bottom line is that scholars believe it has to do with Paul's traditional Jewish roots. When he was in Jerusalem, addressing other Jews, he was Saul, named after Israel's first king. As he left Jerusalem and went into the Gentile areas, Luke, the author of Acts, and even Paul himself, used the Greek name Paul.

Notice this later in Acts 13:

Acts 13:9

⁹ Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit...

OK, getting back to the text,

Acts 9:1-3

¹ Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

Saul was operating under the authority of the high priest (we discussed Caiphus earlier). Clearly, the high priest gave Saul a full endorsement of what he was doing.

Also notice - the Christian church being referred to as *the Way*. This was a name used 4 other times in the book of Acts.

It's interesting when you stop and think about it. The name itself insinuates that Christianity is more than an opinion or one of several thoughts processes. It is the Way! The way of what? The way of everything! The way of life! Everlasting life. The way of joy, peace, the way of purpose and meaning.

Jesus said of Himself:

John 14:6

⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Look at that...not *a way*...*the way*...not *a truth*...*the truth*...He is the life and the only way to the Father!

This is how it is for all mankind...God sent His own Son to show everyone the way. (that whoever believes in Him should not perish) But will *all* follow Him? Are *all* following Him today? Will it become increasingly unpopular to follow Him in the coming years? Absolutely!

Jesus' lack of cultural popularity doesn't make Him any less The Way, The Truth, and the Life!

Truth is truth, even if few believe it. (and truth always wins)

And in our story, Saul wasn't impressed with the Christian church or their name! In fact, the insinuation of it being the Way ticked him off to the point of wanting to murder them! And he had the full endorsement of the high priest!

A good reason to fret if you're the early church, right?

Or is it? Is it time for us to fret when we look at our country?

Is the enemy winning?

What do we do when it looks like the enemy is winning?

First of all...we always ***Stand in the Word of God!***

1 John 4:4

⁴ You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

Isaiah 54:17

*¹⁷ no weapon forged against you will prevail,
and you will refute every tongue that accuses you.
This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD,
and this is their vindication from me,"
declares the LORD.*

**The enemy will not defeat us. We have the power in the name of Jesus!
That is all that matters! In fact, here in this scripture it says it is our
heritage...our birthright! Guys....*Truth wins!***

**Jesus wasn't intimidated by Saul or his movement. He is the Way, the Truth,
and the life! *And Truth wins!***

**So clearly, when Jesus confronted Saul on the Damascus road, we can deduce
that He had had enough! And He personally met Saul right there and put an
end to his assault on the church, and radically changed his heart!**

**Don't think for a minute God doesn't see a world shaking their fist at
Him! *God doesn't want to defeat them, He wants to change their heart!***

He still remains patient...allowing us time to repent!

**And secondly...*It is time to seek God's face like never before!* (can't raise
hands and wring them at the same time)**

Psalm 14:2

*² The LORD looks down from heaven
on all mankind
to see if there are any who understand,
any who seek God.*

Isaiah 55:6

*⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call on him while he is near.*

ng of Stephen was the watershed moment that started the persecution of the church. We looked at Simon the Sorcerer.

Give summary of story up this point.

Acts 8:36-40

³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” [³⁷] [c] ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Footnotes

c. Acts 8:37 Some manuscripts include here *Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”*

As we unpack this, notice it says *As they traveled along the road*. Clearly, after Philip sat with this eunuch and explained the scripture to him, they started traveling together. Philip clearly had no other agenda than ministering to this man. It would’ve been easy to explain the scriptures to him, and then say *OK, well, I did my part. Have a nice day, I’m going back to Samaria where I had a thriving ministry going*. But instead, he was investing time in this man.

Did you know *The greatest resource we spend on people is time*.

It means slowing down, laying down our agendas for God's agenda...being available for those God ordained appointments that come along.

Philip continued to invest in this man, and the Holy Spirit was clearly not done. Look at what happened next:

³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?"

Notice the Ethiopian was the one who made this statement. And it was an emphatic statement. He initiated it, declaring that he did believe. (footnote) He made the declaration of faith...I ended last week's study with:

Romans 10:9

⁹ If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

It is that simple. It is a belief in the mind and the heart. Did you know even the demons know in their mind that Jesus is Lord. But in their hearts, they do not submit. It is a belief in the mind and the heart...*a declaration and a surrender.*

This Ethiopian obviously had made that commitment... and now he wanted to be baptized. He had decided to follow Jesus, and there was no turning back, no turning back!

Water baptism is one of the ordinances we believe in. We believe we will see more and more baptisms in our church as we go forward. (remodel)

A few things about water baptism:

First of all, *Jesus set the example in water baptism.*

Matthew 3:13-17

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

¹⁵ Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

If it was good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for us.

Secondly, *Jesus instructed us to be baptized.*

Mark 16:15-16

¹⁵ He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

But the main thing we need to remember about baptism is this:

It is an outward sign of an inward change. When we are baptized there is an strengthening and confirmation that happens in our soul as we go under the water, representing the old person with all our sins and scars, and come up out of the water a new person, cleansed and renewed.

Water baptism is for our own spiritual strengthening.

Getting back to the text:

³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

Can you imagine that scene? How powerful! This man goes completely under the water and comes up...cleansed, refreshed, rejuvenated. A spiritual triumph! And where's Philip? He's gone! The Lord took him.

Can God do that? Well, I believe God can do anything He wants to do. I really do! He took Enoch before his death in Genesis 5, he took Elijah before his death in a chariot of fire in 2 Kings 2. And now, he takes Philip. But not to heaven just yet. He had more work to do...God transported him to another place instantly.

“That all of God’s men are immortal until God is through with them is a wonderful comforting thought for today. And when He is through with you, He will remove you from the earth.”

J. Vernon McGee

And notice the Ethiopian’s reaction:

and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

He had his priorities. Guys, when you fully get the majestic and miracle of forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life, everything else pales in comparison!

*Do you still marvel at your salvation?
Have you lost your passion for God?*

Did you know God never lost His passion for you?

Zephaniah 3:17

*¹⁷The LORD your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing.*

He rejoices over you with singing!

**But sometimes it’s hard for us to rejoice.
It is easy for it to become old hat.**

How do you get it back?

First of all, remember: God wants you to get your passion back.

God is not condemning you for your lack of passion.

So... Commit it to prayer

Secondly, Make a choice to return to passion.

It comes down to choice, priorities...discipline

OK, let's get back to the text and finish:

⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

God literally transported Philip to “the ends of the earth” as Jesus spoke in Acts 1:8.

Caesarea was a Roman city...no knowledge of anything having to do with Jesus. Philip was about to make the cold call of all cold calls.

We will learn more about this later. But just for fun, let's find out what happened to Philip after he went to Caesarea.

Acts 21:7-9

⁷ We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day. ⁸ Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. ⁹ He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

Here, as we will see in a few weeks, Luke was describing the journey of the other apostles through the region. When they got to Caesarea, who do they find? There is Philip. But now he is called Philip the Evangelist.

Remember, Philip started out as one of the seven chosen to help administer the distribution of food and other services in the first church. Behind the scenes all the way.

And now he is Philip the Evangelist! What does that say to you?

Who do you say you are? Who does God say you are?

Remember, Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter, which means rock, and He did it when Peter was anything but a rock.

“The world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to him. By God's help, I aim to be that man.”

Henry Varley, British revivalist

1 Corinthians 2:9

⁹ *However, as it is written:*

*“What no eye has seen,
what no ear has heard,
and what no human mind has conceived”—
the things God has prepared for those who love him—*

²⁶ *Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.”* ²⁷ *So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian^[a] eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship,* ²⁸ *and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet.* ²⁹ *The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”*

³⁰ *Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.*

³¹ *“How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.*

³² *This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:*

*“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*

³³ *In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”*

³⁴ *The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?”* ³⁵ *Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.*

Last week we unpacked vv26-31. Tonight we will unpack starting at v32:

³² *This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:*

*“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*

³³ *In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”*

This is in reference to Isaiah 53:7-8.

Who is “he” that is mentioned in v32? *Jesus*

This is called a Messianic Prophecy, or a prophecy foretelling of the coming Messiah.

The Old Testament is chock full of prophecies given about the coming Messiah, by several different prophets. Over 320 prophecies, to be exact.

Josh McDowell said:

“The Old Testament is like an intricate jigsaw puzzle. The numerous pieces, on their own, are puzzling — until they are assembled enough to fill out the intended picture. Thus, the New Testament is the decryption key for unlocking Old Testament meaning.”

Jesus Christ unlocked this mystery by fulfilling every single one of them. Not one was missed.

No person that ever walked the face of the earth has impacted humanity like Jesus Christ. He is still to this day the single person in recorded history with the most influence on people, culture, governments, ethics, education, and even entertainment. Even our calendar is based around His birth. BC means “before Christ” and AD means *Anno Domini*, latin for “In the year of our Lord”.

The magazines *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report*, have had Jesus on their covers over 25 times. Time magazine alone has had covers relating to Christianity more than 65 times.

H.G. Wells, known for such works as *The Time Machine*, *The Invisible Man*, *War of the Worlds*, wrote a 1200 page work titled "The Outline of History." Wells was a Darwin supporter, and not a believer. Upon completion of the manuscript, he himself was startled to find that two pages had been devoted to his hero, Plato, but a total of forty-one pages devoted to Jesus Christ - larger than any other historical figure in the work.

Whether you love Him, hate Him, or are indifferent, you must do something with Jesus Christ. He is a polarizing figure like none other in the history of man. In the culture we live in, many people have no problem with the idea or mention of God. But when Jesus is mentioned, that's when lines are drawn, controversy brews, and even wars erupt.

Terry Sartain, police chaplain in Charlotte, N.C., and a member of the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team that served at the Virginia Tech shooting in Blacksburg, Va., in 2007, was given the news three days before a promotion ceremony that there was a change in policy - He could no longer pray in Jesus' name during public events held on government property. He was told by his superiors he had 24 hours to consider his decision. He responded by saying he didn't need 24 hours. He didn't need 24 seconds.

"The only thing I have to offer is Jesus," said Sartain, who asked to be excused from giving the invocation.

Question: *Who do you say that Jesus is?*

Putting aside the spiritual aspects of the question, let's look at some empirical data relating to the odds of a man fulfilling the prophecies spoken about him....purely numbers: A mathematician named Peter Stoner started with the number 8. What are the odds of one man fulfilling 8 prophecies exactly? 1×10^{17} (1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000)

To give you an idea of those odds...If we take 1×10^{17} silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas, they'll cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass of silver dollars thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance would he have of getting the right one?

Professor Stoner went on to consider 48 prophecies and says, "... We find the chance that any one man fulfilled all 48 prophecies to be 1 in 10¹⁵⁷.

This is approximately **the total number of electrons in all the mass of the known universe**. In other words the probability of Jesus Christ fulfilling 48 prophecies is the same as one person being able to pick out one electron out of the entire mass of our universe.

These are the same odds of any one man fulfilling any 48 prophecies. Yet Jesus Christ fulfilled not just 8 or even 48 prophecies, but **more than 324 individual prophecies** that the Prophets wrote concerning the Messiah.

Given the odds, are you ready to bet against Jesus?

You see...the biography of Jesus isn't just the nice story about a good man who is misunderstood and mistakenly killed by evil people.

His death was no accident. It had been planned since the beginning of time.

We didn't deserve His sacrifice because we are good people, and we didn't do anything to twist God's arm. Jesus gave Himself willingly.

Isaiah 53:10 The Message (MSG)

*¹⁰ Still, it's what God had in mind all along,
to crush him with pain.*

*The plan was that he give himself as an offering for sin
so that he'd see life come from it—life, life, and more life.
And God's plan will deeply prosper through him.*

Now I ask again...who do you say that Jesus is? What will you do with Him?

And in our story tonight...What did the Ethiopian do with Jesus?

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

He heard about Jesus and wanted to know more. He made a conscious decision to turn his attention to Christ.

And that is really what it takes. When anyone hears about Christ, they will either look to Him, look away from Him, or choose to ignore Him. There is no other choice!

No one who had an encounter with Jesus Christ ever walked away the same.

Hebrews 12:2

² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus knew why He came...not only to fulfill every prophecy spoken about Him without exception, but to pay the price for our freedom that we couldn't pay!

Matthew 26:53-54

⁵³ Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"

(a legion is a thousand) (He knew why He came)

Jesus chose you over His own comfort. (let's repeat this)

Above all....crucified, laid behind a stone. You lived to die...rejected and alone.

Like a rose trampled on the ground...You took the fall, and though of me...above all.

Does He think about you? Did He think about this Ethiopian?

Look at the intentionality of this story...the HS orchestrated this encounter...

That is why Jesus came! Going all the way back to His birth...

When the angel appeared to Joseph in Matt 1

²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. ”

Jesus means “the LORD saves”.

Sin had created a great chasm between man and God.

And man did not have the ability to bridge that gap himself.

Because of our sin, we deserved God’s full wrath.

God, in His love, created the mechanism of atonement so we could be reconciled with Him and avoid this wrath.

All the Old Testament traditions of animal sacrifice were man’s attempt to appease a Holy God that could not look at sin.

It all pointed to the ultimate sacrifice that would pay the debt once and for all.

John the Baptist said “Behold...”

I just want to close tonight with these questions:

Have you allowed Jesus to take away your sins?

Are you burdened by your choices?

Will you accept His free gift of eternal life tonight?

1 John 1:9

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Romans 10:9

⁹If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Next week

Philip and the Ethiopian

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

So tonight’s episode could be called: *Philip Goes to the Desert – Part 2*

And just a refresher...*who was Philip again?*

Well, if you recall, back in Acts 6, there was a dispute in the church because of the neglect of the Hellenistic Jewish widows. Several men were appointed to help with this and other practical needs of the church:

Acts 6:5-6

⁵ ...They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

That is who Philip is. This man who was appointed to stay behind the scenes, serving humbly and quietly. But when the persecution of the church began, he was thrust onto the scene proclaiming the news of Jesus Christ in a foreign city.

Acts 8:5

⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there.

That should give us all hope...*God can use anyone for His purposes. You don't have to be a pastor or a leader.*

And then last week we saw Philip's anointing as a preacher as he boldly proclaimed the gospel, many were saved, including Simon the Sorcerer.

And now we see the Holy Spirit prompting Philip to leave this place in Samaria and travel to the desert. Tonight, I want to point out three things about this story. (discuss inductive Bible study)

The first concept I want to point out is the Biblical concept of *seasons*.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

*¹ There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:*

Explain seasons.

When God closes a season, it is not an indictment. It is a signal of a new season.

Example of Elijah:

1 Kings 17:1-9

¹ Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."

² Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: ³ "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. ⁴ You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there."

⁵ So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. ⁶ The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

Elijah and the Widow at Zarephath

⁷ *Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land.* ⁸ *Then the word of the LORD came to him:* ⁹ *“Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.”*

If Elijah thought it was all about the “brook experience”, he would’ve missed the next work God had for him.

God is always doing something new.

Getting back to Philip in Acts 8...Second point about this story: *Philip could’ve said ‘no’.*

I mean, think about it...he had a pretty good thing going there in Samaria...a thriving ministry...a following that was growing...success

From last week:

¹² *But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.* ¹³ *Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.*

This gets back to the ‘seasons’ idea...If Philip was convinced this was it, he would’ve missed his next assignment...the famous encounter with the Ethiopian.

Another thing that occurs to me is the journey itself. (show map)

Not only did Philip have a pretty good gig going in Samaria, but he was likely comfortable there. He was settled in, had a good ministry going. Most likely being fed and taken care of.

Now God tells him through an angel to leave all that and go on a journey to the desert. *Wait, what? How will I eat, what will I drink?* And by the way...did you notice his path would take him near Jerusalem? That’s the place he escaped from because of the persecution!

Again, I say: *Philip could've said 'no'.*

But here is a concept we must understand: *Obedience is key to God's blessing.*

When God gives a promise, He asks something of us...our hearts...our devotion...our *obedience*

Deuteronomy 5:32

³² So be careful to do what the LORD your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left. ³³ Walk in obedience to all that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.

Notice that...*if you do these things, this will happen*

Church, I believe we are currently on the cusp of something wonderful and new...even in the middle of this pandemic. God led us right up to this place. And on the other side is our Promised Land. I believe God is about to show Himself in a mighty way. I believe He is about to do something new and He is starting with His church.

We will see *miracles*. We will see *breakthroughs*. And they will be *new...like we have never seen before*. You have to admit, we are already living in times we have never experienced or seen before. That seems to be the theme right now.

I believe this: *God loves to lead His people into new things.*

But we must *partner with God with belief and obedience.*

Jesus said in John 10:27

²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

***It is impossible to follow Jesus without obedience* (think about sheep)**

Jesus also said John 14:15

¹⁵ "If you love me, keep my commands.

And this much I know about obedience – Obedience is a choice

Quit waiting for the emotions (*well, I'm just not feeling it...*)

So when Jesus says “*and they follow me*” He is saying *they have made a conscious decision to do so*

I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back, no turning back.

Philip had a choice...

And God will bring us to that place where He will ask something of us that perhaps doesn't make sense at first.

Could it be that He is waiting for your obedience in order to provide the water shed blessing He has for you?

Last point I want to make about this story:

God didn't give Philip all the details up front.

Acts 8:26-29

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

Notice what the angel said...or in this case, didn't say:

“Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.”

Notice the angel didn't tell him a complete blow-by-blow...

He gave Philip enough information to get started, and then he steered him where he needed to be.

Did you know the Bible says:

Proverbs 16:9

*⁹ In their hearts humans plan their course,
but the LORD establishes their steps.*

Proverbs 20:24

*²⁴ A person's steps are directed by the LORD.
How then can anyone understand their own way?*

Why is this?

God wants us to be dependent on Him and trust Him.

“Manna for the day”

This is a Biblical concept that goes all the way back to Abraham, or Abram:

Genesis 12:1

¹ The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

And later with Joshua at the crossing of the Jordan:

Joshua 3:1-4

¹ Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. ² After three days the officers went throughout the camp, ³ giving orders to the people: “When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. ⁴ Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before.

And in Isaiah 30:21

²¹ Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.”

When we position ourselves in obedience, God will direct our next steps towards victory!

But again, I wonder... why God doesn't tell us everything up front?

I believe it is this: God always works in the supernatural. Therefore, what He has called into being in our lives is supernatural...far beyond what we could hope or imagine.

If God told us ahead of time where we'd be in the future...what it would cost to get there...how much we'd change in the process...we'd either run for the hills or try to control it!

He wants us to trust Him day by day, and grow a little day by day. And that's why He gives us manna for the day.

Next week we'll continue in this story of Philip.

³² This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

*“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*

³³ *In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.*

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth.”^[b]

³⁴ *The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?”* ³⁵ *Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.*

³⁶ *As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?”* ^[37] ^[c] ³⁸ *And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.* ³⁹ *When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.* ⁴⁰ *Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.*

Footnotes

- a. [Acts 8:27](#) That is, from the southern Nile region
- b. [Acts 8:33](#) Isaiah 53:7,8 (see Septuagint)
- c. [Acts 8:37](#) Some manuscripts include here *Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”*

⁹ *Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great,¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is rightly called the Great Power of God.”* ¹¹ *They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery.* ¹² *But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.* ¹³ *Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.*

¹⁴ When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. ¹⁵ When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money ¹⁹ and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

²⁰ Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. ²³ For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

²⁴ Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."

²⁵ After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

I love the book of Acts. It is chock full of drama, excitement, a cast of characters, and the continual demonstration of the power of the HS.

If this were a mini-series, each episode would be a different character and a different story. Tonight's episode would be called "Simon the Sorcerer"

Let's begin to unpack this:

⁹ Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, ¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is rightly called the Great Power of God." ¹¹ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery.

The man Simon clearly had power. He amazed all the people. He boasted about himself as being someone great, and all the people apparently agreed.

I mean, look at what they said:
“This man is rightly called the Great Power of God”.

Look at that...he not only *has* the power, but *is* the power. They basically were treating Simon like he was the Messiah.

But his power was clearly not from God. He is called a sorcerer in v9

In the time of the first church, there were many sorcerers, magicians, and the like. They “wowed” the people with their powers. But where did their power come from? If not from God, where? Does Satan have the ability to give people powers like that?

Matthew 24:24

²⁴ For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

2 Thessalonians 2:9

⁹ The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie

But these days, it is not so much the magicians and sorcerers that we need to watch out for, the Bible says there will be many people in the last days doing things under the guise of doing the Lord’s work.

So what can we do to be on the alert? How will we know false prophets and heresy when we see it? The best test: *It must align with the Word!*

As we search for truth today, remember, ***If something contradicts the Word of God, reject it.***

Matthew 7:21-23

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

I believe this addresses politicians, entertainers, educators, yes...but it also means pastors, church leaders, Christians in general...

Timothy 4:3

³ For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

Back to the story, notice something amazing here: This same man Simon we just looked at...the sorcerer empowered by the devil...he got saved!

¹² But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

Amazing! This just reinforces what I've been saying.

No one is so far gone that God's grace can't change them!

That goes for Saul who was persecuting Christians, that goes for Simon the sorcerer, that goes for anyone! *Don't quit praying!*

Getting back to the text:

¹⁴ When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. ¹⁵ When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

This is referring to the baptism of the Holy Spirit that started in Acts 1.

Acts 1:8

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

(expand on...HS in us as believers, on us...)

And remember...these are Samaritans...

Getting back to our new friend Simon:

¹⁸ When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money ¹⁹ and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

²⁰ Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. ²³ For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

Even though Simon had been saved, it didn't mean he wasn't human. He still had human selfishness, being displayed by this question.

Explain flesh, spirit...2 Cor 5:17

But here is another concept that still holds true today:

We must desire the Holy Spirit Himself above His power.

God's presence and power dwell in us in the Person of the Holy Spirit

But have no fear...Peter wasn't having any of it. He called him on it. We must be able to speak the truth boldly in this world we live in today.

This is just good old-fashioned rebuke and accountability, and good old exposure and conviction of sin. Some people today might be offended by that.

I want you to notice another interesting thing here...notice what Peter said in his rebuke:

²¹ You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.

That's interesting language for Peter to use, considering that Jesus said basically the same thing to him.

John 13:1-8

¹ It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

² The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

⁸ "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

Interesting...(expand on)

In both cases they let their spiritual immaturity skewed their vision of kingdom principles.

In Peter's case, he still didn't understand Jesus to be a servant king.

In Simon's case, he thought the power of the Holy Spirit was negotiable, like everything else in society.

Now, we may not rebuke Jesus like Peter or try to buy the Holy Spirit like Simon, but can show our spiritual immaturity in other ways:

**Perhaps we assume God has forsaken us because we feel like He has.
The Word says I'll never leave you or forsake you.**

**Perhaps we think we think we are getting what we deserve when bad things happen...
The Word says God doesn't treat us as our sins deserve.**

And these days...heresy...

OK, let's finish for tonight. So how did Simon react to all of this? Was he offended? Did he get resentful?

²⁴ Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."

²⁵ After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

- Simon expressed belief in the preaching of Philip ([Acts 8:13](#)).
 - Philip received Simon as a kind of follower ([Acts 8:13](#)).
 - Simon attended meetings of Christians ([Acts 8:18](#)).
- ii. For all these reasons, Philip regarded Simon as a Christian – a follower of Jesus – and baptized him ([Acts 8:13](#)). Like us today, Philip could not actually see into Simon’s spiritual heart and know with complete certainty that he was sincere in his faith; but he had demonstrated enough to make his proclamation of faith credible.
- iii. Yet, it is possible to take Peter’s statement “**You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God**” as evidence that Simon was not a true convert with repentance and sincere faith. His case is then “a warning to anybody who thinks that just because he or she has made a profession of faith or has gone through certain motions expected of Christians that he or she is right with God for that reason. That is not the case.” (Boice)
- iv. “Men may come very near, they may be intellectually convinced of the supremacy of Jesus; they may even decide that they will adopt His ethical ideal; they may go so far as to determine that they will imitate the perfection of His example. But these things do not make men Christians.” (Morgan)
- v. At the same time, Boice observed: “When Peter says, ‘You have no part or share in this ministry,’ it is interesting that he employs the same words Jesus used for him when Peter had objected to Jesus’ washing his feet in the Upper Room. Jesus said, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no part with me’ ([John 13:8](#)). Strong words. Still Peter was not an unbeliever; he was just out of the will of God.” (Boice)
- vi. Without doubt, Simon was headed in the wrong direction, so he needed this rebuke. One could say that he was headed towards hell, from the phrase “**Your money perish with you.**”
- d. **Poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity:** This accurately described Simon’s heart. Yet Peter didn’t attempt to cast a demon of bitterness or iniquity out of him. Instead, Peter called him to repentance (**Repent therefore**), to prayer (**pray God**), and to righteousness (dealing with **the thought of your heart**).
- i. Perhaps *pride* prevented Simon from a genuine belief in Jesus. Before the coming of Philip and the gospel, Simon was an admired holy man in the region, and had been admired *for a long time* ([Acts 8:11](#)), so much so that people declared, “*This man is the great power of God*” ([Acts 8:10](#)). A proud person might give an outward display of faith because it is the “right” thing to do in the eyes of others, but in the secret place of their heart, they may fail to submit to Jesus Christ.

6. (24-25) Simon's reply and a summary of the work in Samaria.

Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me." So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

a. **Pray to the Lord for me, that none of these things come upon me:** Instead of actually humbling his heart before God, Simon asked Peter to pray he would be spared the consequences of his sin. This shows Simon felt a true conviction of the Holy Spirit, but was not yet willing to humble his own heart before God. Peter couldn't humble Simon's heart for him.

i. As bad as Simon's case was, he could still *repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you* ([Acts 8:22](#)). The door of repentance and getting the heart right with God was open to Simon if he would only take it – but Peter could not do it for him.

ii. "His words were what we would call in colloquial English 'a cop out.' He was refusing to do what he had been told he should do and was passing the buck to Peter." (Boice)

iii. The preacher can't believe for you, nor can he repent for you; he has enough repenting to do all on his own. The preacher can pray for you, but you better also pray for yourself – as Peter told Simon to do.

iv. We don't know what became of Simon. We don't know if he followed through on the conviction of heart evident in [Acts 8:24](#). Church tradition says he went off the deep end, and became a dangerous false teacher among the early Christians. It is possible that he did repent and get his heart right with God.

b. **When they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem:** Peter and John had a successful, fruitful ministry in Samaria. Yet they **returned to Jerusalem** instead of continuing to reach out beyond that city.

Let's remember that as we move in to Chapter 8.

Acts 8:1

¹ *And Saul approved of their killing him.*

This is the concluding comment of the stoning of Stephen in chapter 7. Not only was Saul standing there, allowing this to happen, holding their coats as they stoned Stephen, but he *approved* of it. Another translations says he “agreed with it completely”

As we will find out later in this study, this same Saul will go on to be one of the most prolific apostles for the cause of Christ that has walked the face of the earth.

Later, he himself said of this scene:

Acts 26:9-11

⁹ “I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord’s people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.

Look at his use of terms...*he was convinced...he tried to force them to blaspheme...he was so obsessed with persecuting them that he even hunted them down in foreign cities.* He made the persecution of the church his mission...he traveled great distances to do it. However, despite all that, God chose to have an encounter with him and radically change him. This same man later said this about all this work that he was once so zealous for:

1 Corinthians 15:9

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

And he described himself this way:

Philippians 3:5-8

⁵ ...of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ

How does a man go from obsessively and ferociously *persecuting* the church of Jesus Christ to saying that he counts everything as garbage compared to *knowing* Jesus Christ?

That is radical! And you know what this tells me? No one is so far gone that God won't chase them down. As long as someone has breath they can become a believer.

God can radically change anyone or anything!

Are you praying for a loved one, and it seems they just get further away from the Lord? Are you praying for a situation that only seems to be getting worse? Don't give up! God never told you to stop praying.

God can change anyone, God can change anything!

God can change this nation!

God can do anything to reach someone. In this case, Jesus met Saul on a dirt road to Damascus and had an encounter that changed Saul. More on that later.

Getting back to the text, if you'll notice in your Bible, the heading before the second half of v1 is

The Church Persecuted and Scattered

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

This was a water-shed moment...this event triggered a great persecution against the church in the Jerusalem area. Just like that, it was a jailable offense to be a Christian. People were afraid for their lives and were scattered throughout, of all places...*Judea and Samaria.*

Did you notice this intentionality? Does this sound familiar? This goes back to the beginning of it all in Acts 1 when Jesus said to His apostles:

Acts 1:8

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

This was happening exactly as Jesus foretold. He just didn't tell them exactly *how* it was going to happen.

They had already been witnesses in Jerusalem. We looked at the stories...The Holy Spirit coming like a mighty rushing wind and baptizing all of them in the upper room, enabling them to speak in other tongues...many onlookers were amazed...many were added to the kingdom...Peter and John walking into the temple courtyard, healing a lame man...God being glorified, many new believers brought into the kingdom...the apostles performing many signs and wonders, healings...many people were in utter amazement...the word spread quickly...so quickly that the temple leaders felt an urgency to shut it down, but their very attempts came back on them and the word continued to spread.

And now, the enemy was blowing up the church, scattering it from Jerusalem. *On the surface it looked like the enemy was winning.*

**On that, I'll stop and ask this question:
*What do we do when it looks like the enemy is winning?***

Give up? Give in to fear? No...we must remember, *It only looks like the enemy is winning. We know God always wins.*

2 Corinthians 2:14

¹⁴ But thank God! He has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ's triumphal procession. Now he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume.

We must remember that today. It is so easy to get downhearted and assume evil is winning. God allows the enemy to rage at times, but it is always for God's purposes.

God allows evil to arise at times, but it is in order to position His church for a victorious advancement.

And in this case, *The very persecution that was meant to squash the church in Jerusalem caused it to spread to Judea and Samaria, which was exactly what Jesus wanted to begin with!*

OK, so what does that mean for us today?

Each of us has a past. Each of us has fears in the present. The enemy wants to use it against us to discourage us, to disqualify us, to rob us of our hope. But God does the opposite...He takes the very things Satan uses to destroy us and uses them for good. Out of our greatest hurts can come our greatest ministry, amen?!

One author put it this way:

God can and will use pressing circumstances to guide us into His will. Sometimes we have to be shaken out of our comfortable state before we do what God wants us to do.

Let's read on...

Acts 8:4-8

⁴ Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. So who were "those who had been scattered"? Notice what we read a few minutes ago in Acts 8:1:

and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

Did you catch that? The apostles apparently stayed near Jerusalem. Meaning...these were ordinary unschooled believers

who were going out and preaching the gospel! I like how one author put it:

“We shouldn’t think that those who left Jerusalem left as formal preachers. Most were “accidental missionaries” who talked about Jesus wherever they went.”

That’s awesome. Well, I tell you...with God there are no accidents. He is in everything and is always at work. You too are perhaps an “accidental missionary”. *Accidental* in that you didn’t realize you were indeed a missionary. But that is exactly who each of us are...a missionary to your home...workplace...neighborhood. Don’t expect the pastor or church leaders to do it...*We are the only Christ many will ever see!*

Getting back to the text in Acts 8

⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there.

Now, who was Philip? Well, if you recall, back in Acts 6, there was a dispute in the church because of the neglect of the Hellenistic Jewish widows. Several men were appointed to help with this and other practical needs of the church:

Acts 6:5-6

⁵ ...They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

That is who Philip is. This man who was appointed to stay behind the scenes, serving humbly and quietly, is now thrust onto the scene and is proclaiming the news of Jesus Christ in a foreign city.

That should give us all hope...*God can use anyone for His purposes.* You don’t have to be a pastor or a leader.

Colossians 3:16

¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Guys... ***We each have a ministry***

Let's finish up for tonight

Acts 8:6-8

⁶ When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷ For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

We see the power of God getting people's attention. That reminds me of what it says in

1 Corinthians 4:20

²⁰ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

We see this power being displayed in healings, signs, and wonders. And it says there was great joy in that city. What city is that?

⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there.

And what is significant about Samaria, other than it being one of the cities Jesus mentioned in Acts 1:8?

Samaritans.

They were brought into the area of the northern kingdom to occupy the land after Assyria's capture. They intermarried with the Jews left in the area. They grew as a people and even began to expand into the area of Judah.

Because of their connection with Israel, they were exposed to the teaching the God of Israel, about the law of Moses and the tradition of worship.

But they were half-breeds, and clearly saw God as just one of many gods to be worshipped. Look at v33 of 2 Kings 17

³³ They worshiped the LORD, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought.

And then v41:

⁴¹ Even while these people were worshiping the LORD, they were serving their idols. To this day their children and grandchildren continue to do as their ancestors did.

So, really, their faith was - a little of this, a little of that....worshipping the God of Israel, while practicing other superstitions and idolatry.

In the New Testament, the Jews hated the Samaritans more than they did the Gentiles. They considered them “half-breeds”. In fact, modern day Samaritan populations have the genetics of both Israelites and Palestinian Arabs.

This helps us understand the significance of Jesus’ command to go into this area.

God loves all people and wants to save all people.

Even people we think are beyond saving. Even people we would like to condemn in our human nature. God loves them equally.

2 Peter 3:9

⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

, and continue with the story of Stephen. Up until this point we have seen the power of the Holy Spirit coming on the apostles and believers of the first church in manifest ways. We saw them operating in this power. We saw signs and wonders and we saw ordinary, unschooled men speaking with authority.

The last three weeks we looked at Stephen, the first martyr of Christianity

We saw that Stephen was described *a man full of God's grace and power.*

But we also saw that opposition arose. The temple leaders plotted against Stephen, lied about him, and instigated a lynch mob.

And with all this going on, how did Stephen respond?

¹⁵ All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

They were mesmerized...couldn't take their eyes off of him. The glory of God shown all over him. All this while being falsely accused!

Last week we looked at Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin. He spoke with great power and conviction, pointing out their hypocrisy and rebellious hearts towards God.

Tonight, we will conclude the story of Stephen as we see what happened next.

Acts 7:54-60

⁵⁴ When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

V54 says they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. (one translation says cut to the heart, which would indicate a conviction of the Holy Spirit. However, they were disobedient and stubborn, so the conviction that should have led them to repentance instead hardened them further)

This is typical in a person who is running from God.

Has one of your loved ones walked away from God? Do they only seem to be getting even more bitter towards the things of God?

Don't quit praying for them!

The same heat that hardens clay also melts butter!

(pickle-cucumber, darkest before the dawn.)

And what does gnashing their teeth mean?

Grinding their teeth in anger or anguish.

There is another prominent reference to this in the New Testament when Jesus is describing hell:

Matthew 8:12

¹² But many Israelites—those for whom the Kingdom was prepared—will be thrown into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Yikes!

But again, look at the contrast of Stephen in his response. How did he respond to all this?

⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

What a great contrast: *When you are full of the Holy Spirit, you are concerned with heavenly matters.*

When you are full of the flesh, you are concerned about yourself.

And notice what he saw: God opened a window into heaven so Stephen could see Jesus standing at the right hand of God in all His glory, both in full support of Stephen.

What a sight that must've been. I can only imagine.

Were the temple leaders impressed? Did they fall down in awe? Did they ask Stephen to describe such a wonderful sight?

⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.

This was clearly more than they could handle. They were enraged with anger and rushed at him. Forget the trial...forget justice...this man must be silenced...this man must be canceled. (do we see that happening today? If you don't like what is happening, burn it down. There is a word for that...petulant)

Now, I want to show you an amazing similarity in how Jesus Himself was treated by likely the same high priest and Jewish leaders.

Matthew 26:57-68

⁵⁷ Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. ⁵⁸ But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome.

⁵⁹ The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. ⁶⁰ But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.

Finally two came forward ⁶¹ and declared, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.’”

⁶² Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” ⁶³ But Jesus remained silent.

The high priest said to him, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.”

⁶⁴ “You have said so,” Jesus replied. “But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. ⁶⁶ What do you think?”

“He is worthy of death,” they answered.

⁶⁷ Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him ⁶⁸ and said, “Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?”

Do you see a pattern here? Clearly, *The Jewish leaders had religion without relationship.*

Stephen had relationship as his religion, and that is what enabled him to resemble Jesus Himself when being persecuted.

Guys, this is extremely important. As times get worse, you will not make it on religion.

As times get worse, we must have relationship before religion.

(it will be our lifeline)

And because the Jewish leaders only had religion based on their human traditions, their sensibilities were offended, making them outraged beyond belief. (sound familiar?)

(possibly talk about radical dogma and why they are so militant)

By the way...Jesus predicted all this:

John 16:1-3

¹ “All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. ² They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. ³ They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me.

Let’s finish up:

Notice the latter part of v58

⁵⁸ ...Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

This is the introduction of Saul, who will be renamed Paul.

Paul was a young man, in his prime. A member of the Sanhedrin, standing there giving his approval, even holding their coat for them as they stoned Stephen.

As we will find out later in this study, he will go on to be one of the most prolific apostles for the cause of Christ that has walked the face of the earth.

Later, he himself said of this scene:

Acts 26:9-11

⁹ “I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And that is just what I did in

Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord's people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.

Do you know what this tells me? No one is so far gone that Jesus won't chase them down. As long as someone has breath they can become a believer.

Are you praying for a loved one, and it seems they just get further away from the Lord? Don't give up! God never told you to stop praying.

God can do anything to reach someone. In this case, Jesus met Saul on a dirt road to Damascus and had an encounter that changed Saul. More on that later.

Lastly:

⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Again, does this sound familiar? Almost verbatim to what Jesus said on the cross.

Trusting God, showing grace, looking to heaven. Praying for his persecutors.

Was Paul's prolific ministry a product of Stephen unselfish prayer? Why not?

And as we close, notice it says: he fell asleep. That simply means he died.

One author eloquently put it this way:

"The text describes the passing of Stephen as tenderly as possible. Instead of saying simply that he died, it says that he merely fell asleep – with the idea that he woke up in a much better world."

Stephen's Speech to the Sanhedrin

¹ *Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?"*

First of all...several Biblical scholars believe this high priest was Caiaphas, the same priest who was in charge of Jesus' trial. He asks *Are these charges...*

Let's refresh on what the charges were:

Acts 6:11-14

¹¹ *Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God."*

¹² *So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. ¹³ They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. ¹⁴ For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."*

If you will recall, "they" in v11 were the members of the synagogue. The temple leaders. This high priest surely knew was going on. This trial was a complete farce based on lies...just like Jesus' trial.

And I started thinking...wondering, is that how it is...will we as believers be plotted against? Will we be slandered? Are believers persecuted like Jesus?

John 15:20

²⁰ Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.

Guys- we have to remember...Jesus did not come to make us comfortable. He came to bring us life, and life more abundantly. The enemy wants to steal life...so why wouldn't we be attacked by the enemy?

See, persecution doesn't resonate with our sensibilities as Americans with freedom and rights. But as a Christian, we should expect it.

Jesus said in John 16:33

³³ "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Get that – you “will” have trouble. It shouldn't surprise us...

It shouldn't surprise us that we live in a state where we can go to Home Depot...crowded airplanes...*strip clubs*...yet not worship together in church.

Yet it *does* surprise us...it appalls us, and rightly so. And by the way, I don't see it getting any better in the future. The state government now realizes they can shut down church when it makes sense to them. It seems like it will be easier for them next time it suits them.

So what do we do with this? Get depressed? Get angry? Nothing wrong with anger as long as we handle it correctly. It is always what we do with our emotions that get us in trouble.

Look what Jesus said in John 16:33

³³ "...But take heart! I have overcome the world."

That is how we are supposed to handle this persecution. Take heart!

Another version says “cheer up”

Why? Because Jesus overcame the world. And since He overcame, we will too!

Since Jesus overcame the world, we will too!

Matthew 5:10

*¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Getting back to the text, I want you to notice how Stephen responded. He did not defend himself. Instead he regales them with the history of God's interaction with the Israelites. And remember, he is speaking to the Jewish leaders and high priests. This is amazing...they are about to be schooled by an unschooled man. And by the way...if you were ever looking for a summarized version of the entire Old Testament, here it is:

² To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. ³ 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.'

⁴ "So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. ⁵ He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. ⁶ God spoke to him in this way: 'For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated. ⁷ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.'^[b] ⁸ Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

⁹ "Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him ¹⁰ and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

¹¹ “Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food. ¹² When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their first visit. ¹³ On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph’s family. ¹⁴ After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. ¹⁵ Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. ¹⁶ Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

¹⁷ “As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. ¹⁸ Then ‘a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.’^[c] ¹⁹ He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

²⁰ “At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child.^[d] For three months he was cared for by his family. ²¹ When he was placed outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. ²² Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

²³ “When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. ²⁴ He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. ²⁵ Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. ²⁶ The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?’

²⁷ “But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us?’ ²⁸ Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’^[e] ²⁹ When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

³⁰ “After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. ³¹ When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: ³² ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’^[f] Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

³³ “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. ³⁴ I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in

Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt. ^[g]

³⁵ *“This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, ‘Who made you ruler and judge?’ He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.*

³⁷ *“This is the Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.’ ^[h] ³⁸ He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us.*

³⁹ *“But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. ⁴⁰ They told Aaron, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don’t know what has happened to him!’ ^[i] ⁴¹ That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and reveled in what their own hands had made. ⁴² But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:*

*“‘Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings
forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel?*

⁴³ *You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek
and the star of your god Rephan,
the idols you made to worship.*

Therefore I will send you into exile ^[j] beyond Babylon.

⁴⁴ *“Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. ⁴⁵ After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, ⁴⁶ who enjoyed God’s favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. ^[k] ⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who built a house for him.*

⁴⁸ *“However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:*

⁴⁹ *“‘Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.*

*What kind of house will you build for me?
says the Lord.*

Or where will my resting place be?

⁵⁰ *Has not my hand made all these things? '[1]*

⁵¹ *“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— ⁵³ you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”*

OK, so again...Stephen wasn't telling them anything they didn't already know. These Jewish leaders were experts in the law of Moses. So what was Stephen doing?

The answer is revealed in a few verses:

³⁹ *“But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.*

And then

⁵¹ *“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— ⁵³ you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”*

Stephen was pointing out in no uncertain terms that these Jewish leaders were no different than their rebellious ancestors. They had a habit of rejecting those that God sent them.

Stephen even used a term that God used through the Old Testament: *Stiff-necked*. That means *stubborn and haughty*.

Exodus 32:7-9

⁷ *Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. ⁸ They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in*

the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'
⁹ *"I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people.*

OK, so they were stiff-necked...what does that have to do with us?

Question: *Is it possible for us to stiff-necked or haughty today?*

Stiff-necked: *stubborn...set in our ways...lack of submission*

Have we surrendered to Jesus Christ? Surrendered all?

Or are there attitudes and things we are still holding on to?

And how about Haughty: *arrogantly superior and disdainful*

Question: *Is it possible for us to look at the culture today with disdain?*

Stephen was also pointing out something to the Jewish leaders that we need to remember today, during this shelter-in-place time:

God's presence is not confined to a building

⁴⁸ *"However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:*

⁴⁹ *"Heaven is my throne,*

and the earth is my footstool.

What kind of house will you build for me?

says the Lord.

Or where will my resting place be?

⁵⁰ *Has not my hand made all these things?*

God's presence is not confined to one place, even the temple.

This was offensive to these Jewish leaders because the temple was the place where they were in charge. It was full of piety and tradition. It reflected the work of their own hands. They could control things and disperse truth as they saw fit. It appeared that they were worshipping the temple just like the

Israelites worshipped the golden calf in the desert. Notice again what they accused Stephen of:

¹³ They produced false witnesses, who testified, “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law.

That is why Stephen was careful to point out that God’s presence was with Abraham in Mesopotamia, this was well before Abraham even knew anything about a promised land. Stephen also points out that God’s presence was with Joseph when being sold into slavery and was with him when he was second in command in Egypt. And he reminds them that God’s presence was with Moses at Mount Sinai. All of this they couldn’t deny.

God’s presence was not about their precious temple. He does not live in houses made by human hands. *And that is still true for us today, more than ever.*

Next week we will finish the story of Stephen

The Stoning of Stephen

⁵⁴ When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

2. (2-5) God’s promise to Abraham.

And he said, “Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, ‘Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.’ Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even *enough* to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him.”

a. **The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia:** At the very beginning, Stephen emphasized that the **God of glory appeared to Abraham before he even came into the Promised Land.**

i. Not only was the temple unnecessary for this revelation of **the God of glory**; the Promised Land itself was not necessary. God was greater than either, and this explained how Stephen was falsely accused of speaking against the temple. Stephen wasn’t defending; he simply explained.

ii. “A single thread runs right through the first part of his defense. It is that the God of Israel is a pilgrim God, who is not restricted to any one place...If he has any home on earth, it is with his people that he lives.” (Stott)

iii. “So it is not as if Abraham was in Mesopotamia and God, perhaps from Mount Zion many hundreds of miles away, shouted to him, ‘Abraham, come over here. I want you to come to Palestine.’ Rather God appeared to him right there in Mesopotamia in all his glory.” (Boice)

b. **Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you:** God said this to Abraham when **he was in Mesopotamia**. Yet Stephen explained that Abraham did not immediately go to Canaan (he **dwelt in Haran**) and he did not immediately leave his relatives (his father came with him to **Haran**).

i. Abraham’s partial obedience did not take God’s promise away. Instead, it meant the promise was on hold until Abram was ready to do what the Lord said. The fulfillment of the promise didn’t progress until Abraham left Haran and his father behind and went to the place God wanted him to go.

ii. Abraham will certainly become a giant of faith, even being the father of the believing ([Galatians 3:7](#)); yet he did not start there. Abraham is an example of one who *grew* in faith and obedience.

c. **God gave him no inheritance... no child:** Abraham was promised both the land and descendants, but had no outward proof of either. He could only trust God for the fulfillment of these things.

i. With this, Stephen emphasized a relationship with God on the basis of faith and not outward evidences like a temple or the structure of institutional religion and its customs.

ii. Even when Abraham was in the land, he was a pilgrim. He didn't make an idol out of the blessings God had either given or promised. This was a rebuke to the religious leaders Stephen spoke to, because many among them had stopped being pilgrims and they made idols out of the blessings of the temple and the land.

3. (6-8) *God warned Abraham and gave him the covenant.*

“But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress *them* four hundred years. ‘And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,’ said God, ‘and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.’ Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so *Abraham* begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac *begot* Jacob, and Jacob *begot* the twelve patriarchs.”

a. **His descendants would dwell in a foreign land...into bondage:** The promise would not be easy or light for Abraham or his descendants. Yet, God promised to judge the nation that put Israel into bondage.

i. Stephen here suggested the idea that *God knows how to take care of and protect His people*. He rested in that assurance himself, and challenged the council to have the same assurance.

b. **He gave him the covenant of circumcision...Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs:** Circumcision became the sign of the covenant for Israel, and the covenant was passed down through these descendants of Abraham.

4. (9-16) *God's faithfulness through Joseph.*

“And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And the second *time* Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to *him*, seventy-five people. So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers. And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, *the father of Shechem.*”

a. **God was with him:** Again, Stephen emphasized the *spiritual* presence of God with Joseph all the time. Joseph did not need to go to the temple to be close to God – there was no temple. Instead, **God was with him** all the time.

- b. **Becoming envious, sold Joseph:** Stephen mentioned the story of Joseph because he is a picture of Jesus, in that the sons of Israel rejected Joseph, who later became a savior to them (and the *only possible* savior).
- c. **Seventy-five people:** Genesis 46:27 says there were 70 altogether of the family of Israel, when Stephen in Acts 7:14 said it was 75. Stephen quoted from the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, which says 75. The number in the Septuagint is not wrong, just arrived at in a different way, specifically adding five more sons (or grandsons) of Joseph born in Egypt.
- d. **The tomb that Abraham bought:** The only land that Abraham ever actually possessed in Canaan was this burial plot. The rest was received only by faith.

B. The story of Israel from the time of Moses.

1. (17-22) *The early life of Moses.*

“But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt till another king arose who did not know Joseph. This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live. At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father’s house for three months. But when he was set out, Pharaoh’s daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.”

- a. **At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God:** Moses was also like Jesus in that he was favored by God from birth and preserved in childhood. As well, he was **well pleasing to God** without the temple or the customs of institutional religion.
- b. **Was mighty in words and deeds:** Moses was also like Jesus who would come after him, in that he was wise, skillful with words, and a man of **mighty... deeds**.

2. (23-29) *Israel rejects Moses.*

“Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. And seeing one of *them* suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand. And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and *tried to* reconcile them, saying, ‘Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?’ But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?’ Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons.”

- a. **When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren:** At an appointed time, Moses came down from his royal throne out of care and concern for **his brethren**. This was another way that Moses was like Jesus who would come after him.
- b. **He supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand:** When Moses offered deliverance to

Israel, he was rejected and rejected with spite. Israel denied that he had any right to be a **ruler and a judge** over them.

i. Stephen's message was plain: "You have rejected Jesus, who was like Moses yet greater than him, and you deny that Jesus has any right to be a **ruler and a judge** over you."

3. (30-34) God appeared to Moses at Mount Sinai.

"And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, saying, 'I am the God of your fathers; the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and dared not look. Then the LORD said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.""

a. **An Angel of the Lord appeared to him... in the wilderness of Mount Sinai:** Stephen again emphasized one of the main points of his reply to the council – that God, His glory, and His work was not confined to the temple. God **appeared** to Moses **in the wilderness**, before there ever was a temple.

b. **I will send you to Egypt:** Stephen emphasized that God both called and commissioned Moses.

4. (35-36) Moses was Israel's deliverer, despite Israel's previous rejection.

"This Moses whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years."

a. **This Moses whom they rejected:** Even though Israel had rejected Moses and his leadership, God appointed Moses with unmistakable signs, including the burning bush in the wilderness.

b. **He brought them out:** Though Israel rejected Moses at what might be called his "first coming," he still remained God's chosen deliverer for Israel.

5. (37-41) Israel's repeated rejection of Moses.

"This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.' This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, 'Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' And

they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.”

a. **This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel:** Moses promised that there would come after him another **Prophet** and warned that Israel should take special care to listen to this coming **Prophet**. But just like Israel rejected Moses, so they were rejecting Jesus, who is the **Prophet** Moses spoke of.

i. Each individual should consider for themselves how they should *accept* Jesus, and not reject Him. They should receive Him as their Deliverer, the One who can rescue.

b. **This is he who was in the congregation... who received the living oracles:** Moses, like Jesus, led the **congregation** of God’s people, enjoyed special intimacy with God and brought forth the revelation of God.

c. **They made a calf in those days... and rejoiced in the works of their own hands:** When ancient Israel rejected Moses and God’s work through him, they replaced him with their own man-made religion. Stephen applied the same idea to the council he spoke to.

i. The phrase **and rejoiced in the works of their own hands** is especially meaningful. One of the accusations against Stephen was that he blasphemed the temple. It wasn’t that Stephen spoke against the temple, but against the way Israel worshipped the temple of God instead of the God of the temple. Just as Israel worshipped the calf in the wilderness, so now they were worshipping **the works of their own hands**.

6. (42-43) God’s response to the repeated rejection of His messengers.

“Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets:

‘Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices *during* forty years in the wilderness,

O house of Israel?

You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch,

And the star of your god Remphan,

Images which you made to worship;

And I will carry you away beyond Babylon.’

a. **Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven:** In their rejection of Moses and the God who sent him, Israel turned instead to corrupt idols, bringing upon themselves the judgment described in the passage quoted from [Amos 5:25-27](#).

i. Stephen took the passage from Amos and changed it slightly to bring the point to his listeners. Amos said, “*beyond Damascus*” ([Amos 5:27](#)), but Stephen changed it to “**beyond Babylon**.”

ii. Boice explains: “Stephen, who quotes the text, alters it, because he is not talking to the people of the northern kingdom but to the leaders of Israel in the south. It is their history that he has in mind.”

b. **God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven:** The idea here is both important and awesome. Paul later built on the thought of God giving man over to his sinful desires in [Romans 1:24-32](#).

i. It makes each of us consider the question: If we reject Jesus, what will we be given up to?

7. (44-50) Even as Israel rejected God, they still had the tabernacle, and later the temple.

“Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built Him a house. However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:

‘Heaven is My throne,

And earth is My footstool.

What house will you build for Me? says the LORD,

Or what is the place of My rest?

Has My hand not made all these things?’

a. **Our fathers had the tabernacle... Solomon built Him a house:** Stephen’s point was that the presence of the tabernacle or the temple did not keep them from rejecting God and His special messengers.

b. **However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands:** Stephen confronted their idolatry of the temple. In doing so, they tried to confine God within the temple. Yet God is too big to fit in any temple man could make.

i. On a more subtle level, many Christians do the same thing. It may not be the worship of a church building (though certainly that does take place from time to time), but it is the confinement of God to one place. In other words, the only place they meet God is at the church. As far as they are concerned, God is absent from the rest of their lives. In the minds and lives of some today, God might as well only live at the church.

8. (51-53) Stephen applies the sermon to his listeners.

“You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.”

a. **You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you:** One can imagine the angry whispering among the Sanhedrin as Stephen’s history lesson began to make sense. Stephen saw this and knew they were rejecting again the One God sent, just as before.

i. “He takes the sharp knife of the Word and rips up the sins of the people, laying open the inward parts of their hearts, and the secrets of their soul...He could not have delivered that searching address with greater fearlessness had he been assured that

they would thank him for the operation; the fact that his death was certain had no other effect upon him than to make him yet more zealous.” (Spurgeon)

b. **You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears!** Drawing on concepts from the Old Testament, Stephen rebuked those who rejected Jesus as **stiff-necked** (as Israel is described in passages like [Exodus 32:9](#)), and as **uncircumcised in heart and ears** (as Israel is described in passages like [Jeremiah 9:26](#)).

i. In using the two phrases together, he may have in mind a passage like [Deuteronomy 10:16](#): *Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.*

ii. Almost 20 times in the Old Testament, God calls Israel **stiff-necked**. These religious leaders were acting just as their forefathers acted.

iii. Israel prided itself on the sign of circumcision because it separated them from the Gentiles. Stephen essentially said, “You are just like the Gentiles in your rejection of the Lord.”

c. **You now have become the betrayers and murderers:** Stephen’s main point was unmistakable: “As Israel was in its history, so you are today. God gave you the law, but you **have not kept it.**”

d. **Who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it:** This accusation must have outraged the members of the council. They prided themselves on their obedience to the law, even as the Apostle Paul would later claim of his pre-Christian thinking: *concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless* ([Philippians 3:6](#)).

i. Though it must have offended the council, Stephen’s message was true. First, *God is no respecter of places*; that is, though the temple was a wonderful gift from God, it was wrong to overemphasize it as “the house of God.” Second, *Israel at that time was guilty of what they had often been guilty of: rejecting God’s messengers.*

ii. Jesus said that it is impossible for old wineskins to hold new wine ([Matthew 9:17](#)).

Through Stephen, the Holy Spirit showed how the old traditions of Judaism (especially the over-emphasis on the temple) could not contain the new wine of Christianity.

iii. God used Stephen’s coming martyrdom to send the church out into the entire world, but God also used Stephen’s message to show that there was no *theological* reason to prevent the gospel from going to the Gentiles.

iv. The whole idea behind a permanent, stationary temple is “you come to me.” This is why Israel, though they were a light to the nations, mainly thought in terms of the world coming to *them* for salvation. Through the church, God would show a different heart: “I will come to you,” including to the Gentiles.

C. The council’s reaction to the sermon of Stephen.

1. (54) *They were cut to the heart, and convicted by the Holy Spirit.*

When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.

a. **They were cut to the heart:** The council was angry, but because Stephen’s message had hit the target. They could not dismiss or ignore what he said. The Sanhedrin reacted with rage instead of submission to the Holy Spirit.

b. **They gnashed at him with their teeth:** It is remarkable to think of this response from men who were dignified, respected leaders in Israel. This would be as if a group of senators ground their teeth in anger in response to the testimony of a witness at a hearing.

i. The idea of **gnashing at him with their teeth** can't help but remind us of the imagery of Hell. Seven different times, Jesus described Hell as a place of *weeping and gnashing of teeth* ([Matthew 8:12](#)). These men were prominent, successful, and appeared to be religious; yet they were rejecting God and associating themselves with hell, not heaven.

ii. They didn't start **gnashing** when Stephen finished his speech. "All they could do in their frenzy was to gnash with their teeth. It was not a sudden outburst but the tense rather shows that it was prolonged." (Gaebelein)

2. (55-56) Stephen's vision of Jesus.

But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

a. **But he, being full of the Holy Spirit:** This was a great contrast to the behavior of the council. The fact that Stephen was **full of the Holy Spirit** shows the source of his courage, wisdom, and power in preaching.

i. J.B. Phillips' translation has insight: *Stephen, filled through all his being with the Holy Spirit.* This is how we should be filled with the Holy Spirit.

b. **Saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God:** It is difficult to describe exactly what Stephen saw. We can't say if this was a personal vision or if some sort of "window to heaven" was opened, but going beyond the plain description of the text is pure speculation.

c. **Jesus standing at the right hand of God:** It is significant to note Jesus is **standing** here, as opposed to the more common description of Him *sitting* in heaven ([Matthew 26:64](#), [Colossians 3:1](#)), at the right hand of God the Father.

i. We can suppose that **Jesus** was **standing** here in solidarity with Stephen at this moment of crisis. He does not react impassionately to the problems of His people.

ii. We might also consider that Jesus stood to give a standing ovation to Stephen, whose fate made him unique among believers. Among all the followers of Jesus, Stephen was the first martyr.

iii. Jesus said, *Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven* ([Matthew 10:32](#)). Jesus may have also stood to plead Stephen's case before God the Father, assuring that though he was found guilty and punished on earth, he was found righteous and rewarded in heaven.

iv. "Stephen has been confessing Christ before men, and now he sees Christ confessing his servant before God." (Bruce)

3. (57-58) The execution of Stephen by stoning.

Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

a. **Then they cried out with a loud voice:** When Stephen declared that he saw Jesus *standing at the right hand of God*, it was too much. The Sanhedrin reacted quickly, violently, and together. When Jesus, before this same body of men, declared that He would sit at the right hand of God, they had the same reaction and sealed his death as a blasphemer ([Matthew 26:64-66](#)).

i. “For Stephen to suggest that the crucified Jesus stood in a position of authority at the right hand of God must have ranked as blasphemy in the thinking of those who knew that a crucified man died under the divine curse.” (Bruce)

b. **They cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord:** These were distinguished, older men behaving this way. The reaction of the Sanhedrin seems extreme, but is typical of those who reject God and are lost in spiritual insanity. They wailed in agony and covered their ears at the revelation of God, which they regarded as blasphemy.

i. It is a dangerous thing to be religious apart from a real relationship with Jesus Christ. This fulfills what Jesus warned about in [John 16:2-3](#): *Yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.*

c. **Ran at him:** This uses the ancient Greek word *hormao*. This is the same word used to describe the mad rush of the herd of swine into the sea ([Mark 5:13](#)). This was an out-of-control mob rushing at Stephen.

d. **They cast him out of the city and stoned him:** The extent of their rage was shown by their execution of Stephen, which was done without regard for Roman law, and which was performed according to traditional Jewish custom (stoning).

i. The second-century Jewish writing *Mishnah*, described the practice of stoning: “When the trial is finished, the man convicted is brought out to be stoned...When ten cubits from the place of stoning they say to him, ‘Confess, for it is the custom of all about to be put to death to make confession, and every one who confesses has a share in the age to come’...Four cubits from the place of stoning the criminal is stripped...The drop from the place of stoning was twice the height of a man. One of the witnesses pushes the criminal from behind, so that he falls face downward. He is then turned over on his back. If he dies from this fall, that is sufficient. If not, the second witness takes the stone and drops it on his heart. If this causes death, that is sufficient; if not, he is stoned by all the congregation of Israel.” (Cited in Bruce)

e. **And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul:** Saul stood there as the supervisor of the operation. As a member of the Sanhedrin, he had also approved of Stephen’s execution.

i. **Young man** literally means, “a man in his prime.” It certainly does not mean that Saul wasn’t old enough to be a member of the Sanhedrin. In [Acts 26:10](#), Paul says *I cast my vote against them*, and the plain implication was that he had a vote as a member of the Sanhedrin.

4. (59-60) Stephen's last words.

And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

a. **They stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."** Stephen's life ended in the same way it had been lived: In complete trust in God, believing that Jesus would take care of him in the life to come.

i. "The fires... in the olden days never made martyrs; they revealed them. No hurricane of persecution ever creates martyrs; it reveals them. Stephen was a martyr before they stoned him. He was the first martyr to seal his testimony with his blood." (Morgan)

b. **Lord, do not charge them with this sin:** God answered Stephen's prayer, and used it to touch the heart of a man who energetically agreed with his stoning – even though the man didn't know the prayer was being answered. When we get to heaven, we should thank Stephen for every blessing brought through the ministry of Saul of Tarsus.

i. God heard Stephen's prayer, and Paul is the evidence of it. We have no idea how greatly God can use us in our times of suffering.

ii. Augustine said, "If Stephen had not prayed, the church would not have had Paul."

c. **Cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin":** Stephen displayed the same forgiving attitude that Jesus had on the cross ([Luke 23:34](#)). He asked God to forgive his accusers, and he made the promises loudly and publicly.

i. If the gospels contain that which Jesus *began* to do and to teach, they also only contain that which Jesus *began* to suffer. There was a sense in which Jesus suffered along with Stephen as he was martyred.

d. **He fell asleep:** The text describes the passing of Stephen as tenderly as possible. Instead of saying simply that he died, it says that he merely **fell asleep** – with the idea that he woke up in a much better world.

i. If Stephen **fell asleep**, the church had to wake up. "If there had been any rose-colored optimism about quickly winning the Jewish people to their Messiah, that was gone. The Church could not expect triumph without a bloody battle." (LaSor)

ii. Stephen wasn't a superman, but he was a man filled through all his being with the Holy Spirit. Many have little idea of how greatly they can be used of God as they walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Question: *What shows on your face when you face opposition?*

The way we handle stress and opposition says more about our faith than anything we profess on Sunday morning!

Church:

If we act and react like the world – we have nothing to offer the world.

Stephen did not react like the world...even in persecution. It reminds me of the story of Jesus when He was arrested. He had finished the last supper with the disciples, had gone in the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, and was now waiting for the betrayal that He knew was coming:

Luke 22:47-53

Jesus Arrested

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, ⁴⁸ but Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”

⁴⁹ When Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen, they said, “Lord, should we strike with our swords?” ⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

⁵¹ But Jesus answered, “No more of this!” And he touched the man’s ear and healed him.

⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? ⁵³ Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns.”

This is an amazing scene. Jesus knew what was going to happen, and even when it *did* happen, He reacted in a way that is completely contrary to the world.

Look at His resolve:

⁵¹ But Jesus answered, “No more of this!” And he touched the man’s ear and healed him.

Look at this...one of His disciples steps up and defends Jesus (John’s account identifies this disciple as Peter). Look at *Peter the*

enforcer...fighting for Jesus...you gotta love it...I'd like to think I'd do the same. But did Jesus commend Peter for his zeal with the sword?

⁵¹ But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him.

No more of this! What is going on with that?

See, here's the thing: *Jesus understood God had a larger plan.*

In John's account of this story,

John 18:11

¹¹ Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

Jesus was more concerned with God's greater purpose!

How would *we* have responded? How did his *disciples* respond? We don't need to speculate about the disciples, it is right there in vv49-50

⁴⁹ When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" ⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

Guys, we too are living in an hour when it seems darkness reigns. We see in our world today the prophecies given in the Bible about the last times...right becoming wrong - wrong becoming right. *The enemy is laughing!* Human life is marginalized as a choice. People choosing their own genders. Violence and rage abound. Indoor church attendance is criminalized while rioting in the streets is apparently OK. The earth is groaning...wars and rumors of wars. It is unnerving, scary, maddening, it can be downright depressing at times. And the enemy will try to suck us into the vortex of anger, bitterness, hatred, and divisiveness that is so prevalent in our culture today.

So what is God asking of His church? Is He asking for us to step up and be His angry enforcers, ready to strike with swords those that oppose us? Or is there an even greater plan?

In this story, Jesus was only concerned about God's larger plan.

And He showed it by doing something that blows the doors off our human sense of justice...He had compassion on the man and healed him!

Jesus healed the man who had come to arrest Him! Are you kidding me?!

How could He have done that? They were coming to arrest Him!

That takes love! That takes grace! That takes compassion. But more than that, it takes a God-centered perspective and understanding that *With God, there is always more going on than meets the eye!*

Jesus knew He had been given the ministry of reconciliation.

Romans 5:10

¹⁰ For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

And maybe you're saying "Yeah, well that's Jesus. I'm not Jesus."

Guess what church: *We are called to the same ministry of reconciliation.*

2 Corinthians 5:18

¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation

We have been given the ministry of reconciliation.

Do you want to know what is on God's heart right now? A lost world, separated from God, being reconciled to God. *That is the heart of God.*

Did you know that *God loves sinners?*

We cannot preach reconciliation to a culture we are cursing!

And maybe we are not out cutting ears off with swords, but we can easily hide behind a keyboard in the comfort of our recliner and cut with our words.

Church, that is *not* the ministry of reconciliation!

Listen:

There are many issues facing our nation today. Some of the issues are deeply complex and go back many years. We should not assume we can neatly wrap these complexities up in a snappy opinion statement and dust our hands.

Church, we must be wise and careful. Jesus told His disciples:

Matthew 10:16

¹⁶ "Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves."

And we need to follow Jesus' example.

Jesus was firm on the Word of God, but He also had compassion. We too must take a stand on the Word of God, but do it with compassion. *It is the time!*

It is not time for the church to sit down, it is time for the church to stand up. This world needs us to stand up, whether it knows it or not. We stand in the truth of the Word of God. And we speak that truth with love and compassion.

To better understand our culture, I want to introduce you to the idea of *perceived reality*. We each have a perceived reality, right or wrong. We feel very strongly and passionate about something based on our own influences and experiences. That is our perceived reality. On the other hand, we may hear about an issue we

don't perceive as real or truthful and say, "*Well, that's just stupid.*" When meanwhile, for another person, it's not stupid at all, because it is their perceived reality...right or wrong. Just because something is not important or real to us doesn't mean it's not important or real to someone else. **I'm not excusing anything, I'm just saying this is how people are.**

So what is the answer? *Just cave to culture?* No. *Agree to disagree?* Not necessarily. *Just assume it's all relative, like the popular opinion today goes?* No, there are absolutes in this shifting world we live in. And there is absolute truth!

Do I claim to have the answers on this? Not at all. But I do know someone who not only HAS the answer, but IS the answer. Jesus is the answer! He *has been* the answer...He *is* the answer...and He *will be* the answer. And Jesus is our example.

Our culture is full of beliefs we may not agree with, and realities that are counter to the Word of God. We, the church, will never convince anyone of anything on our own. ***We will only stir the pot when we fight in the flesh.***

When we see these things, instead of fighting like the world does and giving in to anger... instead, compassion should drive us to our knees as we recognize and pray against the deception!

Real change requires diligent prayer, first of all. *We need to be praying for our nation!* Real change also requires power from on high to love, listen, discern truth, stand in the truth, speak that truth with love and compassion. But most of all it requires the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, and the *revelation* of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, to convict the world of sin. **Church - *that* is what will change the world!**

Our call as the church is to keep a God-focused perspective in these troubled times...not to get caught up in all the divisiveness and pettiness, not to stress because we think God is expecting us to change the culture's beliefs ourselves, but instead to share the truth of the Word of God and lead the culture to the cross, and let God sort out their beliefs. *We have been given the ministry of reconciliation!*

That is God's larger plan. We see it with Jesus and we see it with Stephen. And we will see even more of it next week with Stephen.

Church – I believe that is what God is asking of us today!

Acts 6:8-15

⁸ Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. ¹⁰ But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

¹¹ Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, “We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.”

¹² So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. ¹³ They produced false witnesses, who testified, “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. ¹⁴ For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.”

¹⁵ All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

So let's dive in and see what the Holy Spirit would show us about this section of scripture.

⁸ Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.

First of all, what a way to be known... a man full of God's grace and power. Let that be said at my eulogy!

Can that be said about you? *Well, Pastor, I don't feel like a man or woman of grace.*

We must understand...this isn't *our* grace...this wasn't *Stephen's* grace...this was *God's* grace! *His* unmerited favor! *His* divine blessing!

God's grace is something He chooses to give us...it has nothing to do with us earning it, amen?!

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Exodus 33:19

¹⁹ ...I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

In the text in Acts 6 it says Stephen was full of God's grace.

What does *that* mean? “Full of” God’s grace...

I believe it meant Stephen not only knew about God’s grace, but was walking in it...he had embraced it and made it part of his outlook on life...He saw that it was grace that had saved him, and it was grace that will guide him...God’s grace was the filter through which he saw life! *Oh, let that be said for me!*

And notice, it also says he was full of *power*. Again...his own power? No, it was God’s power! The Holy Spirit coming on him in power like said spoke of in Acts 1:8

⁸ *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you...*

Power to do what he couldn’t have done on his own.

In fact, HS series...

God’s power and presence dwell in us in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Well, pastor, I don’t feel like I have a whole lot of power these days...

Who said anything about feelings? I’m talking about the truth that is in the Word of God!

Ephesians 1:18-20

¹⁸ *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms*

Notice Paul says *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened*

OK, getting back to the text, we see Stephen operating in grace and power, and it says he:

performed great wonders and signs among the people.

OK, great, I'm sure everyone was thrilled and praising God, right?

Acts 6:9

⁹ Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen.

This is amazing to me. How could there be a pushback when a man is performing great wonders and sign under the power of the Holy Spirit?

But you see it right here in v9...opposition arose.

This shouldn't surprise us, especially because we have talked about the type of men the leaders of the Synagogue were.

But it is really no different for us today:

When you come to Jesus...there will be opposition

When you step out in boldness...there will be opposition

When you begin to leave your brokenness behind...

When you feel called to ministry...

When you commit your marriage to the Lord...

When our church begins to experience revival and grow...

When we make a stand for the Word of God in our worldly culture...

This is just how it is when we stand in the promises of God. The enemy will always challenge us. It shouldn't surprise us. We must be aware!

2 Corinthians 2:11

¹¹ in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

1 Peter 5:8

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

And getting back to Stephen, I don't think he was unaware...and I don't think he was daunted by it. Look at v10:

¹⁰ *But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.*

Can you imagine how that ticked off the Jewish leaders? Here, this unschooled man was schooling them!

So what did they do? Give up and realize they were fighting against God? Hardly.

¹¹ *Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, “We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.”*

¹² *So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. ¹³ They produced false witnesses, who testified, “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. ¹⁴ For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.”*

What did they do? They lied and conspired against him.

Remember...these are the supposed religious leaders of the people. Amazing...

So, for us...question: *Will people conspire against us? Will people falsely accuse us?*

What do we do? Fight back? Get even?

**I want to introduce you to a concept used throughout the Bible...Old and New Testament...*God’s vindication.*
*God promises to vindicate us.***

That means fight for our cause.

And let me tell you, when God fights...He always wins! He is unstoppable!

Look at just a few scripture references:

Psalm 135:14

*¹⁴ For the LORD will vindicate his people
and have compassion on his servants.*

Isaiah 50:8

*⁸ He who vindicates me is near.
Who then will bring charges against me?
Let us face each other!
Who is my accuser?
Let him confront me!*

One of my favorites:

Psalm 37:5-9

*⁵ Commit your way to the LORD;
trust in him and he will do this:
⁶ He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,
your vindication like the noonday sun.

⁷ Be still before the LORD
and wait patiently for him;
do not fret when people succeed in their ways,
when they carry out their wicked schemes.

⁸ Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;
do not fret—it leads only to evil.
⁹ For those who are evil will be destroyed,
but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.*

And Paul echoes this in Romans 12

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

What? Are you kidding? Well, he's not done yet...

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

Guys, that requires something bigger than we are working in us...something like God's grace and power!

I believe Stephen was indeed operating in this grace and power, because look at v15 of Acts 6:

¹⁵ All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

They were mesmerized...couldn't take their eyes off of him. The glory of God shown all over him. All this while being accused!

Guys, that is a godly perspective...and that takes being full of God's grace of power!

Question: *What shows on your face when you face opposition?*

The way we handle stress and opposition says more about our faith than anything we profess on Sunday morning!

We will not effect anyone by acting and reacting like the world. During this time we are in, God is calling us to be different than the world!

¹ Then the high priest asked Stephen, “Are these charges true?”

² To this he replied: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. ³ ‘Leave your country and your people,’ God said, ‘and go to the land I will show you.’^[a]

⁴ “So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. ⁵ He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. ⁶ God spoke to him in this way: ‘For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated. ⁷ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,’ God said, ‘and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.’^[b] ⁸ Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

⁹ “Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him ¹⁰ and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

¹¹ “Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food. ¹² When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their first visit. ¹³ On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph’s family. ¹⁴ After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. ¹⁵ Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. ¹⁶ Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

¹⁷ “As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. ¹⁸ Then ‘a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.’^[c] ¹⁹ He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

²⁰ “At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child.^[d] For three months he was cared for by his family. ²¹ When he was placed outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. ²² Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

²³ “When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. ²⁴ He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. ²⁵ Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. ²⁶ The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?’

²⁷ “But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us?’ ²⁸ Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’^[e] ²⁹ When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

³⁰ “After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. ³¹ When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: ³² ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’^[f] Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

³³ “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. ³⁴ I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.’^[g]

³⁵ “This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, ‘Who made you ruler and judge?’ He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.

³⁷ “This is the Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.’^[h] ³⁸ He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us.

³⁹ “But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. ⁴⁰ They told Aaron, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don’t know what has happened to

him!⁴¹ That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and reveled in what their own hands had made.⁴² But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:

“Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings
forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel?

⁴³ You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek
and the star of your god Rephan,
the idols you made to worship.

Therefore I will send you into exile⁴⁴ beyond Babylon.

⁴⁴ “Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen.⁴⁵ After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David,⁴⁶ who enjoyed God’s favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who built a house for him.

⁴⁸ “However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:

⁴⁹ ““Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.

What kind of house will you build for me?
says the Lord.

Or where will my resting place be?

⁵⁰ Has not my hand made all these things?⁵¹

⁵¹ “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!⁵² Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—⁵³ you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”

The Stoning of Stephen

⁵⁴ When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.⁵⁶ “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

¹ In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ² So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³ Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

⁵ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷ So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

So, as we have been doing on Wednesday nights, let's dive in and see what the Holy Spirit would show us about this section of scripture.

¹ In those days (during this time...about this time...it came to past) when the number of disciples was increasing,(the church was growing) the Hellenistic Jews among them complained (the Jews that were part of the Greek culture, they even spoke the Greek language.) against the Hebraic Jews (Jews who spoke Hebrew and/or Aramaic and lived according to Jewish custom) because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. (Look at this...cultural struggles even back then. Truly, nothing new under the sun)

Here we see an important thing to take note of. Prior to this, the persecution and strife experienced by the church was from the outside. Now, the enemy was stirring it up from within.

Do you think he is not doing that today?

Satan wants to divide and conquer the church.

But rather than get caught up in all that, the leaders wisely chose to diffuse the situation. It wasn't about one side being wrong or right, it was about God's church operating in harmony with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone.

We must remember that today! *Divisiveness is not from the Holy Spirit! Ever!*

Ephesians 4:2-6

² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

I believe the church leaders kept that in mind with their response.

² So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³ Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

They weren't going to play into Satan's tactics...placating hurt feelings...playing referee...They saw this for what it was...it was a simple manpower issue.

The church was growing fast...the apostles were called to prayer and preaching the Word, and were devoting their time to that. But meanwhile, as they did, other things were falling through the cracks...important things such as taking care of the widows, which God's Word calls us to do:

1 Timothy 5:3

³ Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need.

James 1:27

²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

So taking care of widows was an important role of the church. No one was denying that. They *needed* to be cared for...consistently and fairly. But the apostles were also aware of the fact that they couldn't do everything in the church.

³ Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

Look at this. This wasn't some mundane duty that the apostles thought was beneath them. They were saying this needed to be people who were known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. Not only full of the Spirit and wisdom, but *known* to be. In other words...they were known by the people. They were part of the body. The people could bear witness to their calling. They had been around the people, accessible...real. Be one of them...down to earth...

This is so important in church work. *Just hang out and be part of us.* And be full of the Spirit...so full that you minister from the overflow. And look what the apostles said the requirement was for someone in charge of helping widows...*being full of the Spirit and wisdom.* This shows how important every role in the church is.

There is no hierarchy in church work!

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, **but the same Spirit distributes them.** ⁵ There are different kinds of service, **but the same Lord.** ⁶ There

are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

1 Corinthians 12:12-18

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

*¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ **But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.***

So, getting back to the text in Acts 6, the apostles weren't saying they were too important to take care of the widows. They were saying they were called to do something else. Therefore, they needed to get out of the way so that someone who was gifted and called to this work could step in and fulfill their equally important role in ministry.

Typical church: 80 - 20 rule. It's not right!

OK, back to Acts 6, let's pick it up in v5

*⁵ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit (**more on him next week**); also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. (**Did you notice most of these names are Greek?**) ⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.*

Again, notice...they took this seriously. They prayed and laid hands on them. They treated this as a spiritual act.

In the Kingdom of God, all acts of service in the church are spiritual acts.

Also, what is this about “laying on of hands”?

Laying on of hands while praying is about empowering the person with blessing, authority, and power. It was also done during commissioning of a person for service. This goes back all the way to the Exodus when God told Moses how to prepare the Levites for service in the temple.

Numbers 8:10

¹⁰ You are to bring the Levites before the LORD, and the Israelites are to lay their hands on them.

This is a serious thing. Look how Paul warned Timothy:

1 Timothy 4:14

¹⁴ Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

And now, let’s wrap up tonight’s study by getting back to v7 of the main text:

⁷ So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

With the church operating efficiently and unity, with everyone engaged and serving in their calling...the Word of God was spreading. This is how a church is supposed to operate. And notice, it says the number of disciples increased rapidly. Notice it doesn’t just say *converts*.

What is the difference between a convert and a disciple?

Well, a convert is simply that...a person who has converted. A person who has believed in Jesus Christ as their Savior. That’s wonderful...congratulations. But that’s just the beginning.

***A disciple is a follower or student of a teacher or leader.* And in this case, it is a person who has believed in Jesus Christ as their Savior, and then has decided to follow Him and study His teachings... it means we want to put His word into action by striving to live the way He wants us to live. In other words, someone**

who wants to make Jesus not only their Savior, but their Lord...Lord of their life!

Can you imagine saying you have fallen in love with someone without getting to know them? Or – can you imagine giving up all that you are and following someone blindly without knowing anything about them? It is the same way in being a Christian.

To know Jesus is to love Him. And we know Him by spending time in His Word and in His presence.

I love the old song “*I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back...no turning back*”

Now notice one more thing in our text. Look at the intentionality of Acts 6:7

⁷ So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Get that...a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Wait, what? These are priests! What have they been doing up to this point?

Well, let's go back and review who these Jewish priests were.

In Chapter 4, we learned that the high priests were mostly from wealthy and aristocratic families. They were politicians who maintained a good relationship with the Roman rulers in that area. They dominated the temple, and claimed that their family lines, and social and economic status gave them their authority.

Many of them were Sadducees, who held tight to the written Torah as the only authority (the first five books of the Old Testament). They didn't believe in the priestly written or oral traditions. *They were the epitome of legalism.* They were among the group that John the Baptist called a Brood of Vipers.

Their compromise with the Romans and their haughty and pompous positions caused the common Jew to hate them.

These were the priest who were constantly testing Jesus, trying to catch Him saying something they could convict Him on. They were the ones who instigated the crucifixion of Jesus.

Now, we understand the significance of what Acts 6:7 says

and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

This shows the power of God. When His Spirit is moving, anything can happen!

In chapter 3, we saw that power being displayed as Peter and John healed a lame man at the temple gates. There was a crowd there that saw this miracle and were utterly amazed.

In chapter 4 we saw Peter and John called into the Sanhedrin for questioning by the Jewish elders. These elders were obviously intimidated by this power being displayed by the followers of this man named Jesus. A power that was gathering a following and making many new converts. They tried to shut it down, and gave the apostles a warning and released them.

We saw the apostles returning back to the other believers to give them a report. We saw the believers' God-centered focus as they prayed and raised their voices to God. God answered their prayer, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

In chapter 5 we saw the apostles continue to perform many signs and wonders. We saw Peter and John put in jail, only to be freed from jail by an angel of the Lord. We saw 3 characteristics of a miraculous move of God:

When God moves, it is supernatural.

When God moves, there is no question who did it.

When God wants something to happen, nothing can stop Him

Tonight, we'll finish this chapter

²⁵ Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people." ²⁶ At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

²⁷ The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸ "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this

name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”

²⁹ Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings!” ³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. ³¹ God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. ³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

³³ When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. ³⁴ But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. ³⁵ Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. ³⁶ Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. ³⁷ After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. ³⁸ 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. ³⁹ But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

⁴⁰ His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

⁴¹ The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. ⁴² Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

Again, as I’ve often said in these Wednesday night studies, this story is chock full of intentionality and purpose. We see a process at work, and God is the process. Let’s unpack this story.

²⁵ Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.” ²⁶ At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

Look at the reaction of the captain and his officers. Clearly, they knew something was going on here. They were worried about a revolution...an insurrection. Obviously, the movement was gaining momentum and a following. This was nothing to shrug off. *That should encourage us today.* Remember, we serve the same God that was working behind the scenes here. When God begins to work wonders in His church during this pandemic...when revival comes to the church right in the middle of the persecution it is facing...when signs and wonders are being displayed...no one will be able to deny it.

Isaiah 40:13

*¹³ Yes, and from ancient days I am he.
No one can deliver out of my hand.
When I act, who can reverse it?"*

Guys, simply put...*When God moves, it is powerful and unstoppable!*

Moving on

²⁷ The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸ "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

Well...here's the thing...they were guilty!

Let's take a look at Matthew 27:19-26

¹⁹ While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him."

²⁰ But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

²¹ "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor. "Barabbas," they answered.

²² "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" Pilate asked.

They all answered, “Crucify him!”

²³ “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

²⁴ When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!”

²⁵ All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!”

²⁶ Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

So that was the scene. And these chief priests and Jewish elders were the ones instigating it. Look at the strong statement they made “His blood is on us and on our children!”.

Boy, they have a short memory, don’t they?! Here in Matthew 27 they were basically saying “Fine, we’ll be responsible. Blame us...just crucify Him already!” And then later in Acts 5, they were saying to the apostles “you act as though we are responsible for that man’s death...you keep blaming us for Him being crucified” Do you see the deception here? The apostles weren’t buying any of it, and they called it what it is. We need to have that same resolve today. There is flat-out deception happening in the world today under the guise of self-important humanitarian talk...it is smooth and silky in appearance...it will make sense on the surface, from a human standpoint...it will wreak of arrogance and self-arrival, insinuating that mankind is progressive to the point where we don’t need a God...that we are smarter than God...

2 Timothy 3:1-5

¹ But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.

And in Chapter 4

2 Timothy 4:3-4

³ For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

Moving on

²⁹ Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings! ³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. ³¹ God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. ³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

Look at the boldness of Peter. This is an amazing statement when you consider whom he was speaking to. These were Jewish elders and leaders of the temple. Yet they were more concerned about obedience to man than to God. And here was an untrained man reminding them of the importance of obeying God rather than man!

And this also shows that although the Bible says for us to submit to authority, obey the laws of the land, and pray for our leaders, it does not say that we obey them over God when there is a direct conflict!

We are called to submit to God first and always!

And now, notice what Peter says in v32

³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

“We” are witnesses. Notice he doesn’t say “you” are witnesses.

1 Corinthians 1:18

¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Guys...we need to get this. The world doesn't understand because the world is perishing. But for us that do understand...notice...*it is the power of God!*

We've got the power in the name of Jesus...though Satan rages...

John 14:15-17

Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit

¹⁵ "If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

The Jewish elders could not accept the power of the Holy Spirit because they neither saw Him or knew Him. They rejected Jesus, the One who sent the Holy Spirit...they same Spirit that Peter said in Acts 5 was given to those who obey Him.

And they proved this by their reaction in v33

³³ When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.

Now watch...God intervenes by using one of their own...

³⁴ But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while.

He gets up and gives a compelling argument about releasing the apostles. His argument was simply this: *If it's not true, the apostles are phonies and the mob will kill them. If it is true, then God is indeed in it and to fight the apostles would be fighting God Himself.* Guys – I believe God was behind even this...using an unlikely and unsuspecting man to do His will.

Guys: *You can't fight God. He wins every time!*

You can't defeat Him, you can't out-smart Him, you can't put Him aside. We must remember that today!

And was this man's speech effective?

⁴⁰ His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

Look at that. They released them, but had them beaten first. They just had to get that in there...we'll show them who's in charge and what happens to those who disobey us!

Look at the apostles' reaction...I love it!

⁴¹ The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. ⁴² Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

The Jewish leaders were trying to intimidate the apostles and even had them beaten. But instead, the apostles left **rejoicing. Can you imagine that scene? Guys, you can't make this stuff up!**

And look at the wording of v41

⁴¹ The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.

What? Rejoicing that they were beaten? No, it says they rejoiced because they were counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus! Now that is perspective! I wonder how we would do in that situation? We get bent about having to wear a mask in public!

One author put it this way:

"This challenges each of us as followers of Jesus. They continued where we may have stopped. We often find the threat of social rejection enough to make us keep quiet about who Jesus is and what He did for us. We need to have the apostles' courage and determination to stand firm for Jesus Christ."

Guys, the world needs Jesus now more than ever!

The Apostles Persecuted

¹⁷ Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. ¹⁸ They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ²⁰ “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.”

²¹ At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. ²² But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, ²³ “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” ²⁴ On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

Let’s unpack this, and learn more about our unstoppable God.

¹⁷ Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.

What were they jealous of? The apostles’ personalities? Their good looks? Their snappy clothes? No. They were jealous of their power and influence on the people.

This is amazing. The apostles were operating with power like the people had never seen. There were miracles happening, signs and wonders. You would think the Jewish leaders would have been praising God, knowing that all their knowledge of the Torah...all the teachings of the prophets...everything had pointed to this. Yet, instead, they were filled with jealousy! Crazy!

They clearly felt that because of their high position, family lines, and upbringing, *they, if anyone*, should've been the ones displaying power.

“I am a Jew, I was born into the right family...I have all the proper training...I know people in high places...why wouldn't God give me that kind of power?”

But see, here's the thing...*God will bless who He chooses to bless, and use who He chooses to use.*

Exodus 33:19

¹⁹ *...I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.*

He does not show favorites, and He sees through the things man looks at. He is not impressed with qualifications, resumes, training...He looks at the heart. *What is the qualification for being blessed by God?*

2 Chronicles 16:9

⁹ *For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.*

This should give us much encouragement. Because we see in the Book of Acts a group of Christians that had nothing going for them. The church was new, with unproven leaders. They weren't educated, they had no money, no modern means for spreading the gospel. They faced incredible opposition and enormous obstacles. Yet what *did* they have? They believed and obeyed God, their hearts were fully committed to Him. And thus, they were empowered by the Holy Spirit to do the impossible and bring a simple salvation message to an unsaved world.

When God works with someone whose heart is fully committed to Him, it is unstoppable, and there is no limit to what can be done!

Guys...*God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called.* What happened here in the Book of Acts was done by ordinary men, and *likewise, for us* - what will happen here at Crossover will be a clear work of the Holy Spirit and it will be done through common broken people, amen?!

Each of us has a past. The enemy wants to use it against us to discourage us, to disqualify us, to rob us of our hope. But God does the opposite...He takes the very things Satan uses to destroy us and uses them for good. Out of our greatest hurts can come our greatest ministry, amen?!

God's intent in this story was to reach thousands of people with the good news, and He was using ordinary people to do it.

Yet, notice the next verse in Acts 5

¹⁸ They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.

I can just hear them now "We'll just put an end to this right now."

But did they put an end to it?

¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.

They were rescued simply because of this...God did not want them in jail!

And guess what...God wins! Every time!

When God wants something to happen, nothing can stop Him

And in this case, He wanted the apostles to go right back and tell the people all about this new life!

I tell you guys... God is a romantic at heart. His heart is for the lost...His heart is for the hurting...His heart is for the broken!

God will move heaven and earth for your freedom and healing. He will stop at nothing to see you reach your destiny, to see you embracing the real you He created you to be. And if God wants you free, nothing in this world can bind you. Amen?

But the enemy sure tries to stop it, doesn't he?

Let's get back to the story...

²¹ *At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.*

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles.

Oooohhh...they must be really mad this time...*don't make us get the full assembly of the elders...But look what happens next, did the full assembly of the elders intimidate God?*

²² *But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported,* ²³ *“We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.”* ²⁴ *On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.*

I mentioned this last week:

The guards were literally standing right there. They had not seen or heard a thing. They didn't even know the apostles weren't in their cell! Can you imagine their surprise?

Come on, you couldn't write a script better than this!

I can just hear the officials as they are wringing their hands...”Wow, didn't see that coming”

Look at v24

²⁴ *On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.*

Guys, I just submit to you that if this were something that could easily have been written off as coincidence, these officials wouldn't have been at a loss, wringing their hands in worry.

The reason they were wringing their hands is because they realized their plans were thwarted by the unstoppable God!

Psalm 33:10-11

¹⁰ *The LORD foils the plans of the nations;
he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.*
¹¹ *But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever,
the purposes of his heart through all generations.*

Psalm 94:11

¹¹ *The LORD knows all human plans;
he knows that they are futile.*

Proverbs 19:21

²¹ *Many are the plans in a person's heart,
but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.*

Isaiah 43:10-13

¹⁰ *"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD,
"and my servant whom I have chosen,
so that you may know and believe me
and understand that I am he.
Before me no god was formed,
nor will there be one after me.*
¹¹ *I, even I, am the LORD,
and apart from me there is no savior.*
¹² *I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—
I, and not some foreign god among you.
You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "that I am God.*
¹³ *Yes, and from ancient days I am he.
No one can deliver out of my hand.
When I act, who can reverse it?"*

When you look at the Book of Acts, you see this theme:

Persecution was meant to squash Christianity. But God took the very act of persecution and used it to spread the Gospel like wildfire. Another name for the Book of Acts could be "The Unstoppable Church".

And the reason is because *We serve an unstoppable God*

It has nothing to do with our tenacity, our determination...our hard work...it is because God is unstoppable, and His will is unstoppable!

When God wants something to happen, nothing can stop Him

Here's what I've noticed about something that is unstoppable...*it can't be stopped!*

God cannot be stopped!

Last week we looked closely at what the angel said to the apostles when he freed them *“Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.”*

He freed them so they could tell others about this new life.

God still calls us to do the same today.

Tonight, I want to point out 3 things in the intentionality of this story. Notice in vv18 and 19 it says:

¹⁸ They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.

And then in vv22-24

²² But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, ²³ “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” ²⁴ On hearing this

report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

As I pondered this I was reminded of something. I felt the Holy Spirit gently speak this truth: *When I move, it is supernatural.*

Look at this story, you couldn't write a movie plot for the SyFy channel any better than this. And again, look at the intentionality of it. God could've gotten these men out of the jail a number of ways. But look at the detail given:

During the night an angel opened the doors and brought them out. *Wait – that would've been noisy! Well, maybe the angels transported them out silently. No, it says the angel opened the doors (remember, intentionality).*

Well, maybe the guards weren't there and didn't see it. Or maybe the angel knocked them out beforehand. *No, it says the officials went back and found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing by the doors...with no one inside. (again, remember...intentionality)*

The guards were literally standing right there. They had not seen or heard a thing. They didn't even know the apostles weren't in their cell! Can you imagine their surprise?

Come on, you couldn't write a script better than this!

When God moves, it is supernatural.

That is the very essence and nature of God – supernatural.

That's what supernatural means...beyond natural.

One person said:

To God, nothing is more natural than the supernatural.

Reinhard Bonnke said, *With God there is no maximum.*

What are you facing today? Do you believe it is too big, even for God?

For God, there is no maximum!

Psalm 77:14

*¹⁴ You are the God who performs miracles;
you display your power among the peoples.*

Daniel 4:2-3

² It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.

*³ How great are his signs,
how mighty his wonders!
His kingdom is an eternal kingdom;
his dominion endures from generation to generation.*

That, my friends, is our great God! Great in power, great in wonders. He is King, and His dominion endures from generation to generation! Nothing is too difficult for Him, and for Him there is no maximum!

And in this story in Acts 5, we definitely see the supernatural happening. But that was then. How about now? I would say we'd all agree we need the supernatural today more than ever! Let's all say this: *God, we need your supernatural power!*

So why does God move in the supernatural? Well, we've established that first of all...that's all He knows. He is supernatural, so everything He does is supernatural. But I believe it is also for this reason:

When God moves, there is no question who did it.

God said to Moses in Exodus 6:7

⁷ I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.

And in Ezekiel 20:42

⁴² Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the land I had sworn with uplifted hand to give to your ancestors.

This is a theme all throughout the Old Testament. God working in the miraculous so that His people would know that He alone is God.

*Then you will know that I am the LORD
Then you will know that I am the LORD*

But get this...it also for a watching world:

Ezekiel 36:23

²³ ...Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.

And in our story here in the Book of Acts, again, God could've gotten them out of jail a number of ways. But He does it in a way that leaves no doubt who did it.

Look at v24

²⁴ On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

Guys, I just submit to you that if this were something that could easily have been written off as coincidence, these officials wouldn't have been at a loss, wringing their hands in worry.

Guys: God left no doubt who did it!

This was something He did, and only He could do!

That's what this is about...God doing something only He can do!

Now more than ever, He wants His people to know that, and He wants the world to know that!

We are not placing our confidence in the president, in the governor, in Congress, in Dr Fauci, or even in the COVOD vaccine...God wants the world to know there is none like Him, and He alone is their only hope!

Isaiah 43:10-13

¹⁰ “You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD,
“and my servant whom I have chosen,
so that you may know and believe me
and understand that I am he.
Before me no god was formed,
nor will there be one after me.
¹¹ I, even I, am the LORD,
and apart from me there is no savior.
¹² I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—
I, and not some foreign god among you.
You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “that I am God.
¹³ Yes, and from ancient days I am he.
No one can deliver out of my hand.
When I act, who can reverse it?”

Zephaniah 3:19-20

¹⁹ At that time I will deal
with all who oppressed you.
I will rescue the lame;
I will gather the exiles.
I will give them praise and honor
in every land where they have suffered shame.
²⁰ At that time I will gather you;
at that time I will bring you home.
I will give you honor and praise
among all the peoples of the earth
when I restore your fortunes
before your very eyes,”
says the LORD.

Guys – when God moves, He leaves no question who did it! *before your very eyes*

If it were something we could do on our own, it wouldn't be miraculous!

If we could heal ourselves on our own, we wouldn't need His miraculous healing power.

If we could fix our problems on our own...

If we could save ourselves...

If we could figure our own way out of this pandemic...

Guys, I believe this...God in His infinite wisdom knows when His people need an infusion of faith...a booster shot of faith to get them through and take them to the next level. And He will allow us to be put in a position where we must rely on Him and call on Him, and stand in faith that He will something miraculous.

And that “something” will have the same characteristics of the story we read tonight:

- **It is miraculous, something we could not have done ourselves**
- **It will be obvious who did it**
- **The world will see and God will get the glory!**

²⁷ *The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest.* ²⁸ *“We gave you strict orders not to teach in this*

name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”

²⁹ Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings!” ³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. ³¹ God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. ³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

³³ When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. ³⁴ But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. ³⁵ Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. ³⁶ Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. ³⁷ After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. ³⁸ 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. ³⁹ But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

⁴⁰ His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

⁴¹ The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. ⁴² Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

There’s a lot here. Last week unpacked vv17-20. Tonight, I want to look more at v20 and see what the Holy Spirit wants to say. Let’s read vv17-20 again and get a running start.

¹⁷ Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. ¹⁸ They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ²⁰ “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.”

The angel freed them from jail. But it wasn't just for their own sake. He in essence said "Go right back to the place you were before you got arrested. Go right back into the line of fire. You have an important job to do."

But notice the angel didn't tell them to go back and have a mic drop moment. He didn't tell them to go back and show everyone how they were right and the Sadducees were wrong. The angel was not at all concerned with the politics of the moment, or proving any kind of point, other than carrying out God's plan. And what was that plan?

tell the people all about this new life.

I wonder if God would say that to us today. I wonder...are we telling anyone about this new life, or are we too busy blaming and complaining? I just wonder...

Maybe, just maybe, God's still saying that to us today...

I have freed you from the prison of your past, now go tell the people all about this new life

I have redeemed you and kept you from eternal damnation, now go tell...

I have kept you safe during this pandemic, now go tell...

I have provided for your needs, now go tell...

We must understand...What God did for us, He wants to do for others

God did not save us so we could be comfortable and protect our comfortable lifestyle. He saved us so we would tell the people all about this new life.

And notice specifically what the angel said...tell them all about it. i.e. Don't just have your fish symbol on your car, or wear your snappy Christian shirt or ball cap and call it good. We are supposed to be telling others about our new life...all about our new life. Have you ever noticed you can't tell somebody "all about" something by briefly mentioning it.

This takes allowing ourselves to be inconvenienced, it takes commitment, it takes seeing beyond the politics and stresses of the

day, and seeing people the way God does, with an eternal perspective...it takes having the mind of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:12-16

¹² What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. ¹⁴ The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. ¹⁵ The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, ¹⁶ for,

*“Who has known the mind of the Lord
so as to instruct him?”*

But we have the mind of Christ.

Do you see what this is saying? We are not supposed to be like the world who doesn't have the Spirit. They make judgments based on human wisdom, and are not concerned with the things of God.

We (on the other hand) are supposed to have the mind of Christ.

And part of Christ's mind and mission was to teach the principles of God's kingdom. That's exactly what He did...that's what His teachings were about...that's what His parables were about. The kingdom of heaven is like...

Matthew 9:35

³⁵ Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

Jesus was about the Father's work...sharing the good news of the kingdom, telling the people all about this new life...and we are called to do the same.

Notice in John 17 (I mentioned this last week)

John 17:15-19

¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Look at the parallel here...

In our story in Acts 5 the angel said *Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life."*

Go tell the people...

And Jesus is saying in John 17 As the Father had sent Him into the world, He is sending us into the world.

Guys...that is our mission. I feel the Spirit saying *"God did not save us so we could be comfortable. What He did for us, He wants to do for others."*

And as the day is approaching rapidly when Jesus returns, time is getting short. We must be about the Lord's business.

In Mark 16:15 we are commanded

¹⁵ He said to them, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation..."*

And I also noticed the angel said “new”. Did you catch that? Go tell them all about this *new* life.

This just tells me again...God is all about the new. He has no intent of repackaging the old.

I don't believe He is only interested in helping us get through this pandemic somehow. I believe He wants to do something new.

Isaiah 43:19

¹⁹ See, I am doing a new thing!

Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

*I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland.*

And Jesus said in Rev 21:5

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

God can take a dried up useless **life** and transform it into a **life** of purpose and grace. When **God** says to **His** Children He will **do a new thing**, it means you will move to a level of freedom you have never known before. It also means that **God** is about to surprise **your** enemies beyond recovery.

But ***There cannot be the beginning of the new until there is an end of the old.***

Luke 5:37-38

³⁷ And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. ³⁸ No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.

Amplified

³⁷ And no one puts new wine into old ^[a]wineskins; otherwise the new [fermenting] wine will [expand and] burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. ³⁸ But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.

Christ is our new garment (righteousness) and our new wine that is poured into a new wineskin (our new life and divine nature). Many today are trying to patch up their old garments (self-righteousness), hoping their old lives can hold the new wine of the Spirit.

Ephesians 4:22-32

²² *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

²⁵ *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ “In your anger do not sin”^[d]: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.*

²⁹ *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

¹⁷ *Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.*

This is amazing. The apostles were operating with power like the people had never seen. There were miracles happening, signs and wonders. You would

think the Jewish leaders would have been praising God, knowing that all their knowledge of the Torah...all the teachings of the prophets...everything had pointed to this. Yet, instead, they were filled with jealousy! Crazy!

Of all things, why be jealous over this? I thought of this for a while...

Did you know that when we are jealous of someone else, we are being self-absorbed. We are making it about us, and not the good-fortune of the other person. Rather than rejoicing for the success of the other person, we are making it about us and the fact that we don't have the things that person has. It is the ultimate example of self-absorption. That is exactly what these Jewish leaders were doing. And I don't believe God will ever bless jealousy!

Galatian 5:19-21

¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Besides the sheer jealousy on display, there was something else going on...as we discovered in past studies, the Jewish leaders were full of themselves, they saw themselves as the last word on all things having to do with God or the temple. They let their egos get in the way of doing the Lord's work. They loved the power and control they had because of their high position. And this amazing thing that was happening was a direct threat to that authority. But more than that, it was a threat to their status quo. So their immediate solution was to discredit it. And by the way...aren't we seeing that in the world today regarding the Christian church. I believe it will get worse.

And another thing about this persecution...the apostles were in good company. Jesus Himself was persecuted because of His good works and power. He warned the disciples they would be treated the same.

Matthew 10:22-24

²² You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. ²³ When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I

tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

²⁴ *“The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master.*

Jesus was basically saying “if it happens to me, why wouldn’t it happen for you too?” We need to remember that today, amen?

This is so important for us to remember.

1 Peter 2:9

⁹ *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

This phrase “God’s special possession” in the KJV is “peculiar race”

Getting back to the text in Acts 5:

¹⁸ *They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ²⁰ “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.”*

As I was studying this section, I felt the Holy Spirit whisper:

My intent is to free my people from the prisons that wrongfully keep them.

If that doesn’t bring a hallelujah, I don’t know what will!

God is a romantic at heart. And His heart is for His church. He will move heaven and earth for your freedom and healing. He will stop at nothing to see you reach you destiny, to see you embracing the real you He created you to be. And if God wants you free, nothing in this world can bind you. Amen?

But I also noticed this...God didn’t free them from the prison so they could go run away and be safe. Notice, the angel freed them and then said:

²⁰ *“Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.”*

Guys, this right here will preach.

God loves us and wants to free us. But it is not just for our sake. He wants us to then share this message of freedom to a dying world.

He doesn't save us and then give us a pat on the back and say "There you go child. You're good now."

If that were the case, He'd just take us to heaven the moment we believe!

Look at how Jesus prayed in John 17:

John 17:15-19

¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

(expand on)

And that is exactly what we see here..."go tell the people about this new life"

That is exactly what we are called to do today...right in the middle of this pandemic and chaos.

God's heart is for the lost!

God is calling us to stop cursing the culture, and instead, show them the love of Christ!

¹² The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. ¹³ No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. ¹⁵ As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he

passed by. ¹⁶ Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

As we unpack this, let's get a running start by going back to Chapter 4, v29:

²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus. ”

³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

This is regarding the encounter Peter and John had in the Sanhedrin.

Notice their prayer:

Now Lord, consider their threats and get us out of here. Please protect us from all this, we can't handle it. And please do something about "those people."

No...instead:

²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

What a prayer! In the middle of the heat being applied...in this case, real life persecution...of all things, they prayed for even more boldness!

Can you imagine if *that* was the longing of our hearts and our prayer during what we are facing today?

Lord, consider what is happening in our nation...consider the anti-Christian sentiment building in our nation's leadership...in the media, in the schools, in the politically correct mob mentality...consider the church closures...consider the efforts to shut us down...and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. In the middle of this chaos...stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

Lord, bring revival...and let it start with me!

That was the heart of the first church...the current events were just different.

And how did God respond? Was He pleased with their request?

Acts 4:31

³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

And that is exactly what we see happening in Chapter 5.

So what does that mean for us, here today?

If you want to know what would please the Lord during this time, pray a prayer like that. Let that be your concern instead of being so concerned about what “those people” are doing or not doing.

This is the essence of what I preached Sunday...if you didn't catch it, go listen again. God is about to do something mighty right in the middle of all of this mess. He is calling His church to return to Him...to call out to Him...to be strong and courageous...to rise out of the ashes instead of remaining in them and grumbling...again I ask...*can you imagine if the first church just sat around and grumbled about the persecution?*

Throughout the Word of God, Old Testament, New Testament, this has been His call:

Isaiah 40:28-31

²⁸ Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

*The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.*

*He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.*

*²⁹ He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.*

*³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;*

³¹ but those who hope in the LORD

*will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.*

Isaiah 55:6-7

*⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call on him while he is near.*

*⁷ Let the wicked forsake their ways
and the unrighteous their thoughts.*

*Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*

John 3:16-17

*¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that
whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did
not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world
through him.*

Acts 3:19

*¹⁹ Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that
times of refreshing may come from the Lord*

2 Timothy 4:3-5

*³ For the time will come when people will not put up with sound
doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a
great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They
will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you,
keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an
evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

And getting back to the first church, we see their courage and boldness. Was it effective?

Acts 5:14

*¹⁴ Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were
added to their number.*

God was bringing the increase right in the middle of the persecution!

Here the church was meeting in Solomon's Colonnade, which was basically a large covered area right there in the open. The unbelievers could not deny that there was something powerful going on, yet many of them were too afraid to be seen with them.

Nevertheless...

Question: Can it happen again? Has God run out of power? Is He out of the miracle business?

Guys: *I believe it is coming! We must be prepared!*

(Talk about God moving me to get church building prepared.)

Now I want to point out one more thing before I move on. Notice v12:

And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade.

NKJV says it this way:

And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch.

The church was unified. One heart...one mind...

No one was complaining...no one grumbling. No agendas...no politics...That alone is evidence of the power of the Holy Spirit. One author put it this way:

"Often, the fact that God's people are together all with one accord is a greater display of the power of the Holy Spirit than any particular sign or wonder. Our selfish hearts and stubborn minds can be harder to move than any mountain."

Oh, that we could be part of a unified church that wants to make a difference in this world we live in now! A church that is solely concerned with advancing the kingdom...nothing else!

Let's wrap up. Acts 5:15-16

¹⁵ As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. ¹⁶ Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

This was a church operating in unity, with belief and obedience, and because of this the Holy Spirit's power was on full display. Miracles, signs, wonders. People were convinced that if they could even be in the apostle's shadow they would be healed.

This wasn't about Peter and his spirituality...this was about any one person...this was about ordinary, untrained people operating in belief and obedience and the power of the Holy Spirit. *And He can do it again.*

This story, my friends, is about God, showing His great sovereignty and power. And it is the same for us today. The story is not about the pandemic, about our nation in upheaval...it is about God. He is writing a wonderful story, and I for one, want to be part of it! How about you?

¹ Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ² With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

³ Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴ Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

⁵ When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶ Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

⁷ About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

⁹ Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

¹⁰ *At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband.* ¹¹ *Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.*

This story is bothersome to many. I struggled with it myself in the past. On the surface it looks like God punished them because they didn't bring every single penny from the sale of their property. As if God and His church are like a tyrant king who overtaxes his subjects. Let's establish one thing up front:

Psalm 24:1-2

¹ *The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;*

² *for he founded it on the seas
and established it on the waters.*

Psalm 50:9-12

⁹ *I have no need of a bull from your stall
or of goats from your pens,*

¹⁰ *for every animal of the forest is mine,
and the cattle on a thousand hills.*

¹¹ *I know every bird in the mountains,
and the insects in the fields are mine.*

¹² *If I were hungry I would not tell you,
for the world is mine, and all that is in it.*

This is an important concept...God owns it all! The earth and all that's in it! It's His! Not ours! We are just the stewards of it. If we could get that concept, especially now with all the craziness and upheaval in our country. *It is the Lord's. The world is His! We are His!* He is aware of what is going on in His creation and He has a plan. And His plans are always for good! God is showing us clearly in recent events that what we call ours and what we base our security on is shaky at best...it can all be taken away. What *can't* be taken away is our status as God's children, that cannot be taken! Nor can our joy...our peace...and get this...our power! God is calling His church back to a place of power...back to Him, surrender whatever it is that you are holding on to...return to the Lord, call on His name, seek Him while He may be found.

And in the context of this story, God could've given the church whatever they needed. He could've said the word and they could've had

all the money and supplies they needed to do their ministry. So it is not for His sake we are told to give to the His kingdom.

Anything God commands us to do is for our own good.

It is always to teach us something...to build our faith!

He wants us to willingly love...willingly serve, and willingly give. He will not twist our arms.

2 Corinthians 9:7

⁷ Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

So back to our story of Ananias and Sapphira. What is really going on here? If it is not about squeezing every cent out of them, what is this story about?

To understand what is happening, we need to go back to the end of chapter 4.

Acts 4:32-37

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), ³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

What we see is a church that is operating in the power of the Holy Spirit. This first church was coming together in unity and generosity. They were making sure all who had needs were taken care of. Morale was high. Enthusiasm was high. People were doing amazing acts of generosity and were obviously being revered for it. Luke specifically mentions some by name.

Ananias and Sapphira wanted in on the action. They wanted some of those kudos being given to others. They wanted to be known for selling their property and giving to the church...but they wanted to do it on their own terms. They wanted to keep back some of it, but make everyone else think they were bringing it all. This story is about deceit!

There is also hypocrisy and lack of faith, but the main takeaway is deceit. And deceit will interrupt the power of a church, make no mistake.

**There is another example of this in the Old Testament.
Give back story of Joshua.**

Joshua 6:15-19

¹⁵ On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. ¹⁶ The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city! ¹⁷ The city and all that is in it are to be devoted^[a] to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent. ¹⁸ But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. ¹⁹ All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury."

And they did just that. They took the city and it was a great victory.

However, Joshua chapter 7 begins with this:

Joshua 7:1

¹ But the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the LORD's anger burned against Israel.

A man named Achan saw the bounty of the victory and coveted some of it. He took a beautiful robe, some gold and silver, and hid it in the

ground under his tent. Because of his deceit, the Israelites were defeated in their next conquest, the city of Ai.

Again, I ask...was the story about God needing every single robe and piece of silver and gold in order to be satisfied, as if He needs anything from us?

No, again, it was the deceitful manner in which Achan took matters into his own hands, didn't have the faith to fully obey...He didn't understand that God would provide for all his needs, and so he get his "share" and hide it under his tent.

The theme here is that *Deceit shows a lack of faith in God.*

And I believe God takes that seriously.

Now maybe we don't hide expensive robes under our house, or steal gold and silver form the temple treasury...but perhaps we:

Trust God with most things, but hold onto one of two things we want to control

That could be anything from holding onto something we know we should surrender, to choosing not to tithe because we think we can't afford to. Meanwhile we have plenty of money other things we want.

These attitudes display a lack of faith!

Getting back to the story in Acts 5...here is the irony: *Nobody had asked Ananias and Sapphira to sell their property to begin with!* Look a v4:

Acts 5:4

⁴Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

It's amazing...this whole thing was completely unnecessary!

So it had nothing to do with whether or not they sold their land and gave it all to the church. *It was a heart matter!*

This wasn't about the fact that Ananias withheld the money, but was instead about his deception in implying that he did give it all. And his wife was in on it too. They had obviously conspired.

They wanted everyone to see their spirituality and know of this great sacrifice of giving everything...without actually giving everything!

Again, I get back to 1 Corinthians 4:20

²⁰ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

When we are operating in power, we don't need talk!

One author put it this way:

“Their sin is imitated in many ways today. We can create or allow the impression that we are people of Bible reading or prayer when we are not. We can create or allow the impression that we have it all together when we do not. We can exaggerate our spiritual accomplishments or effectiveness to appear something we are not. It is too easy to be happy with the image of spirituality without the reality of spiritual life.”

And again...what is a spiritual life? Talk? No – power!

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), ³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.

Last week, Twila taught v32 (thank her)

Tonight, we see in this text a continuation of this theme of power.

³³ *With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.*

Going back to the beginning of it all in Acts 1:8 Jesus was telling his apostles to wait there in Jerusalem until they received the missing key ingredient they needed in order to fulfill their destiny. And what was that missing ingredient? *A course in homiletics? (the art of preaching) Maybe it was training in defending the faith...how to argue your faith? Or, perhaps it was a seminar on building your resume so you could get some good speaking engagements?*

No. These may be fine, but they are not going to bring victory over the darkness.

No one is ever changed, no one has ever come to Christ by our arguments or eloquent speech. It is always about power...the power of the Holy Spirit, coming on us from on high to do amazing things through His power.

Jesus said *no one is able to come to Me unless the Father draws them...*

God has me on this theme right now. I believe He is trying to tell His church that it is time to return to Him! Seek the Lord while He may be found...fully surrender...the time is short! His Son is returning soon, and we have important work to do. This is no time for our victim mentality...this is no time for licking wounds or living in the past...this is no time for living for ourselves...***and it is no time for idle talk***

1 Corinthians 4:20

²⁰ *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.*

I have read this verse several times lately in my messages in different contexts. I have prayed and asked the Lord why He keeps bringing me back to it. And then it occurred to me that Paul and Peter didn't pull this lame man aside in chapter 3 and assail him with their biblical knowledge and stories. They didn't argue with him...they didn't have to convince him of anything...they were simply walking in the power and victory of the Holy Spirit and the miracle happened!

When we are walking in power, we don't need talk.

In fact, I believe God is saying to us:

Power first, then talk.

There's an old saying that has been circulating in the church for years:

Preach the gospel at all times - and when necessary, use words.

The poet Ralph Waldo Emerson said it this way:

"Who you are speaks so loudly, I can't hear what you're saying."

Have you noticed there is no shortage of talk these days?

Social media, news, opinions, theories, accusations...name-calling...blame game...I mean *We know exactly what others should be doing, right?!*

This world does not need more talk. It needs the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit like never before!

Church: *the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.*

And what I hear this saying to us now is:

If our lives aren't backing up our talk, then we have no power or credibility!

We will never be able to live victorious lives of power...*We will never be able to win anyone to the kingdom with our words when we are still the walking wounded ourselves...*still living in defeat...still living in brokenness...still living in insecurity...we will have no power and no credibility!

I believe God would say...get your own house in order...repent and respond obediently to what I've called you to...let go of the idols...let go of the past...let me heal you...seek My face...I want to do a new thing and you will need to be full of MY power to walk in it...the time for talk is over...it is time for power! *If MY*

people (not the rioters...not the rest of the world...not “those people”)...MY people who are called by MY name will humble themselves...

If we make God’s business our business, He will make our business His business!

Amen?!

Now, I want to show you something else in the text in Acts 4.

³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them.

Get this: *When the church is operating in power, people’s needs are met.*

It just happens!

i.e. When the church is operating in power, the church is the church it is meant to be

Spiritual gifts are on display...the great commission is being carried out...the needy are cared for...

The answer to all questions regarding the church: *Be filled with the Spirit and operate in His power!*

I don’t know about you, but this is an epiphany to me!

*God, we don’t know how to reach the youth of today! **The answer?** Be filled with the Spirit and operate in His power!*

God, we want to develop a food ministry so we can feed the hungry! Be filled with the Spirit and operate in His power!

God, show us how to build our childrens department! Be filled with the Spirit and operate in His power!

God, we want to reach the different cultures in our neighborhood. Show us how to develop a bi-lingual ministry here in Clovis! Be filled with the Spirit and operate in His power!

God, we have a dream for a building expansion that will provide a street level lobby and elevator so that we no longer turn people away with physical limitations! Be filled with the Spirit and operate in His power!

You see, when the church is operating in power it is no longer us. It is no longer about:

- **Our qualifications or abilities**
- **Our training and experience**
- **Territorialism!**
- **It is no longer about preferences and prejudices**
- **It is no longer about control or our own agenda**
- **And it is surely no longer about coddling insecurity!**

It is solely about God being glorified and the advancement of His kingdom, and this advancement is powered by the matchless power of the Holy Spirit!

And the first church was united in this cause!

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.

And later....from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Now that's a church that is ready to see miracles happen...ready to take the kingdom! I want to be part of a church like that, how about you?

And one last exciting point, that appeals to the heart of a pastor:

*God, show us how to fill the church! Bring revival, Lord! **The answer?***

Be filled with the Spirit and operate in His power!

Acts 2:47

⁴⁷ ...And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

No, it was about power from high...necessary power to do a God-sized task you wouldn't be able to do otherwise!

³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Notice that... *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit*

Wait a minute, Acts 2:1-4 says:

¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Notice here in v4 *All of them were filled with the Spirit...*

And yet tonight in Chapter 4 we see them being filled again...

What's the story on that? Why filled again? Did they leak?

Bottom line: The experience on Pentecost was not a one-time experience. That scene in Acts 2 was just the *first* time it happened, when the Holy Spirit came in glory and power.

But remember, this in-filling, or baptism, as Jesus referred to it, was another way of saying *immersion*...full immersion, as in being submerged in water.

And this immersion is an on-going process for a Spirit-filled believer.

We see this throughout the book of Acts. We will see Peter, Paul, other apostles filled again with the Spirit for empowerment to do what they were called to do.

In fact, for Peter, this is the third time it is mentioned that he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Now I want to go back to John 20 and show you something. This next scene happened when the resurrected Jesus was still walking among them. He had not ascended yet, and thus had not sent the Holy Spirit in a permanent manifest way.

John 20:19-22

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

This was well before Pentecost, and even before He told His apostles to remain in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. This "breathing of the Spirit" was a temporary enabling, because Jesus was still there with them.

Later, at Pentecost, after Jesus had ascended, the Spirit's indwelling became permanent. And this was when the church began.

But again, I want to point out the fact that even though this powerful indwelling happened at Pentecost, we see references throughout the New Testament of the apostles “being” filled with the Spirit.

The idea is, they were *continually filled*...and guys - *we are the same*. In fact, we were made for this! It is the fuel we need to thrive as a believer!

Jesus didn't just breathe on His disciples and say "*There, that's good enough*".

We see a repeated process as demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 4 of Acts

And tonight we see in Chapter 4 there was a need to be filled again. And this time they were empowered with boldness to speak to Word of God.

It is not a one-time event, and it's not just about the sensational. What I mean by that is ...it's not just about a powerful move of the Spirit - and then everything's alright....and then we sit around and wait until the next one.

No. It is clear there was a need to be filled again and again for the apostles to be empowered to do what they were called to do.

And this is for us today! Jesus didn't just breathe on them 2,000 years ago. He continues to do it today. We, like the disciples, desperately need the power of the Holy Spirit to do what we are called to do.

I also submit to you that without the Holy Spirit, and being filled with His presence, you cannot:

- Be the man or woman of God you are called to be
- Be the husband or wife, father or mother you were called to be
- Achieve the inner healing, wholeness, freedom and maturity God has called you to
- Walk away from your past brokenness

- Fulfill your God-ordained destiny

Zechariah 4:6

⁶... *'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.*

So, we need to be filled. And apparently....more than once!

A Spirit-filled life should not be a "hit-and-miss" existence

on again off again....

We don't have to walk around as if there are some moments when we're filled with the Spirit and other moments when we're not...moments when we're "more spiritual" than others. We can be continually filled with His Presence.

Now more than ever we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, need to be filled with His authority, with the power of the Holy Spirit working in their lives.

Analogy of a sail of a sailboat:

Expand on.....

Sail must be continuously filled with wind to drive the boat

Ephesians 5:18

¹⁸ *Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.*

The Greek word is *plerousthe*

Present imperative verb meaning "*constantly being filled, or keep being filled*"

Many examples in Bible of those "full of the Spirit"

So, how do we keep our hearts overflowing? our sails filled?

I believe it starts with desire and determination.

Remaining filled with the Spirit starts with desire and determination

“Lord, fill my sails today”

We set our minds on things above. We set our hearts like flint on the things of God.

We make up our minds...it takes discipline...it takes a choice

"I believe firmly that the moment our hearts are emptied of pride and selfishness and ambition and everything that is contrary to God's law, the Holy Spirit will fill every corner of our hearts. But if we are full of pride and conceit and ambition and the world, there is no room for the Spirit of God. We must be emptied before we can be filled."

DL Moody

Secondly:

We remain filled with the Spirit through repentance

I used the analogy of a sail a few minutes ago:

Sin hinders our ability to live by the Spirit (being constantly filled)

When the rope of a sail comes untied, the sail just flaps in the wind:

The boat is dead in the water

Subject to drift with the current

With no forward progress, no steering capability

Likewise, in our lives....we drift...dead in the water

But repentance re-ties the rope so the wind can fill the sails again

“Revival cannot be organized, but we can set our sails to catch the wind from heaven when God chooses to blow upon His people once again.”

G. Campbell Morgan.

And third:

We remain filled with the Spirit by spending time in His presence

Worship, reading His Word, prayer, meditating on Him

When I find the joy of reaching Your heart

When my will becomes enthralled in Your love

When the things of this earth become shadows in the light of You

I worship You, I worship You

The reason I live is to worship You.

“Abandonment to God is of more value than personal holiness”

Oswald Chambers

Open your Bibles to Acts 4:23-31

²³ *On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵ You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:*

*““Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?*

²⁶ *The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord
and against his anointed one.*

²⁷ *Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. ²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”*

³¹ *After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.*

As we begin to unpack this, we see in v23

²³ *On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.*

This must’ve been quite a scene. Can you imagine the excitement, the drama? I’ll bet they told them every detail.

“They asked us under whose authority the lame man was healed, so we got a chance to tell them about Jesus! Then they even took note that we weren’t educated men, but we had been with Jesus! Then they told us not to tell others about Jesus. But you should have heard Peter tell them that we were more about pleasing God than man! It was awesome!”

And then notice the people’s response:

.²⁴ *When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God.*

*That's a pretty good response. What is your first response to good news?
To bad news?*

They had a prayer meeting! Not sit around and talk about it.

And notice it says they raised their voices together in prayer to God.

**There is nothing wrong with praying silently...praying in a
whisper...but there are times when it just feels fitting to cry out in a
loud voice! Amen?**

Psalm 33:3

³ *Sing to him a new song;
play skillfully, and shout for joy.*

Psalm 47:1

¹ *Clap your hands, all you nations;
shout to God with cries of joy.*

Psalm 66:1-2

¹ *Shout for joy to God, all the earth!*
² *Sing the glory of his name;
make his praise glorious.*

So why shout to God? Why raise our voice when we pray? Is God hard of hearing?

*It is for us. There is something that happens in us as we muster the
breath and energy it takes to shout, we engage our senses. We wake
up...but also, get this...it is contagious. Have you ever noticed at a ball
game, people rarely shout alone? As the crowd gets into it, a new
energy builds and it captivates us.*

Well, if my favorite ball team deserves a shout, I'd say the Lord of All Creation does! So indeed, shout to the Lord, all the earth let us sing. Raise our voices in praise...raise our voices in prayer!

Now let's pick it back up and look at their prayer.

²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵ You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

*"Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?*

*²⁶ The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord*

and against his anointed one. (reference to Psalm 2)

²⁷ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

Notice this. They were recounting back to God His attributes, His works, His sovereignty, His power. It reminds me of the famous verse in Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 32:17

¹⁷ "Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.

I have to admit, I like doing nice things for DeeDee. And when I do, she usually tells me thanks and gives me an atta-boy. I like that affirmation...it feels good.

I want to explain something about God. He doesn't need affirmation...he doesn't struggle with worth, with self-esteem, He doesn't need validation...in fact, He doesn't need to be reminded,

He doesn't have a bad memory...in fact, He doesn't need anything!

The original Hebrew language used several names for God. Each of them described a different and beautiful attribute of God.

El Shaddai: *God Almighty, The All-Sufficient One, The Mighty One, our refuge, and all we need to sustain us.*

And another one is Elohim - All-powerful God, Creator of all things

Genesis 1:1

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

The word for God here in Gen 1 is Elohim

The sentence structure “*in the beginning God*” indicates God’s self-sufficiency, eternal existence, and His mighty power and sovereignty that can create all that we see.

He is the Mighty One over all of creation – this earth, the sun, moon, and stars – He created all these wonders by the work of His own hand.

David used this attribute about God to describe Him in several Psalms:

Psalm 14:1

*¹ The fool says in his heart,
“There is no God.”*

Psalm 54:4

*⁴ Surely God is my help;
the Lord is the one who sustains me.*

But I want you to notice something important else...in Isaiah 46, God Himself describes Himself as this creating and sustaining God, but adds to it:

Isaiah 46:4

*⁴ Even to your old age and gray hairs
I am he, I am he who will sustain you.*

*I have made you and I will carry you;
I will sustain you and I will rescue you.*

God still reminds us today that He is Elohim – Creator and All Powerful God. His omnipotent power is at work in every breath we breathe, in every sunrise, every sunset, in the way He holds the stars in the sky, and the way He sustains His people through difficult times. We can rest assured, we are created and sustained by an Almighty God, we never have to fear. He is all we need.

God is all-sufficient, self-sufficient...but get this...

God doesn't need us...but He wants us

Here in Isaiah He reminds us that He is the One who made us. But He made us for relationship with Him. He tells us that even into our old age, He sustains us, carries us, and rescues us!

God knows we need Him, and He wants us to need Him!

So when we recount to God who He is to us...when we acknowledge His sovereignty, His majesty, and His power...yes, we are honoring and glorifying Him...but get this...we are reminding ourselves of these things. It builds our faith, it engages our senses just like raising our voice does!

What a mighty God we serve! He can handle my problem!

And that brings us back to the story in Acts 4. The believers had recounted God's greatness, and then in v29, they brought their request.

²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

In other words, God You are so great, what is this to You? Now that's a way to pray with power!

But notice something else, look what they asked for:

enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

Of all things to ask for after Peter and John being brought before the Sanhedrin, interrogated...threatened...they barely made it out alive.

It seems to me they'd be praying for a good hiding place...praying for God to move them somewhere else where they weren't in danger. But instead, *they prayed for even more boldness!*

I love it! That was no mere human request. Remember...power!

And was God pleased with their request?

³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

c. **They spoke the word of God with boldness:** They received the **boldness** they asked for. "The word *boldness* means lucid and daring statement. In the Greek the word is *parresia*, 'telling it all.'" (Ogilvie)

i. This **boldness** is necessary today; we need to *tell it all*. We often deliberately hide the work of God in our life from others who would actually benefit from hearing about it.

ii. Their **boldness** was a gift from God, received through prayer. It was not something that they tried to work up in themselves.

Acts 4:5-22

⁵ The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.

⁶ Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. ⁷ They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ Jesus is

*“the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone.” Psalm 118*

¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

¹³ When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. ¹⁵ So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶ “What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. “Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.”

¹⁸ Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! ²⁰ As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

²¹ After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. ²² For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

Let’s unpack this, starting at v5:

⁵ The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.

⁶ Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest’s family.

This is that group of elite Jewish elders that we looked at last week...steeped in tradition and legalism. Most of them were from wealthy aristocratic families...

Moving on to v7

⁷ They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: “By what power or what name did you do this?”

What a question to ask. A lame man was made to walk, and of all the things to ask, *this* is what their concern was. As we will see, they were intimidated

and perplexed by this amazing and powerful thing that had happened...and the main reason was that they could not control it. They saw it as a threat to their status quo...a threat to their high position of authority...they weren't at all comfortable with this...so they immediately sought to discredit it.

Does the enemy still do that today? Seek to discredit the things of God?

Seriously, think about that...rather than letting the conversation be about the amazing miracle...the wonder and power of God...they took this route.

2 Timothy 3:1,5 addresses this:

¹ But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.

⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.

And we see that here in this story, last week we looked closely at the Sadducees who were the epitome of legalism...they knew the law, but literally did not believe in the resurrection *or* the supernatural.

They indeed had a form of godliness, but denied its power.

Tonight, I want to show you how subtle this is. Because it runs deeper than blatant denial of the supernatural.

We deny the power of God when we try to reduce it to what we are comfortable with.

Let's look at a perfect example of this in the 9th chapter of Book of John.

Turn there please. In this scene, Jesus' ministry was well under way. He had been moving from place to place, teaching about the Kingdom of God, and performing miracles.

John 9

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

¹ As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

³ “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

⁶ After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. ⁷ “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

⁸ His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some claimed that he was.

Others said, “No, he only looks like him.”

But he himself insisted, “I am the man.”

¹⁰ “How then were your eyes opened?” they asked.

¹¹ He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.”

¹² “Where is this man?” they asked him.

“I don’t know,” he said.

Look at this... This man was blind from birth...and “just happened to be there” when Jesus walked by. But this wasn’t a coincidence at all, this was another God-ordained moment. Just like when Peter and John entered the temple gates and the lame man was there.

And notice, even Jesus’ disciples wanted to rush to sum it all up with “who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind”

As ridiculous as that sounds, I fear that kind of question is still asked today in the church...it just gets repackaged.

You brought this on yourself...there must be unconfessed sin in your heart.

You don’t have enough faith. You just need to believe more.

Guys, please...don’t do this. That is not a church that is safe place to heal and not hide. (it just heaps more shame on)

Quid-pro-quo

But Jesus wasn't having any of it...He brought it back to God being glorified.

³ *“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.*

And now, let's look at how Jesus interacted with the blind man:

⁶ *After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷ “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.*

Did you know Jesus never healed the same way twice? Why is that?

Guys...here's my point: *God's power will not be put in a box.*

He will not let us box it up, make it predictable and comfortable and controllable. His power is wild and untamed! God will do His work according to His will, and He will not allow us to keep it within our comfort zone or even within our theology!

He wants to do something new. That is why He is calling us now as a church to return to Him and lay down any attitudes, mindsets, slaughter some sacred cows...experience a fresh and new personal revival ourselves.

Lord, bring revival - and let it start with me!

We so often live in a bubble where all we know is what we have experienced...and we think that is how life is. We are fixed in our minds about what church looks like, and even what serving God looks like. But God is allowing us the chance to recognize this, to lay down our predispositions...and be open to seeing things a whole new way in the Spirit...to see that the church is not inside four walls...to see that the lost and hurting world is the harvest field...***we must open our minds and our hearts to what God wants to do...not focus on what makes us comfortable.***

Guys, I don't know about you...but I will not be found guilty of denying God's power by trying to reduce it to what I am comfortable with!

Because I believe God is about to move in a whole new way in the world. *Can't you sense it?* I believe revival is coming and it will look different than what we have experienced.

Now notice this next section in John 9 starting at v13:

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing (wow...we'll get to the bottom of...)

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."

Look at this...classic! They did not want to admit they witnessed the power of God, because this was outside of their own tradition and training, it was not in their comfort zone...they couldn't control it. In order to deny its power, they reduced it down to what they did know...and that's the law.

They fixated on the sabbath rule, and all the while the Lord of the Sabbath Himself was in their presence. They found comfort and familiarity in the law and their tradition. Their pontification made them feel holy and spiritual.

1 Corinthians 4:20

²⁰ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

In essence, these Pharisees were saying...Wait a minute...let's talk about this a while...this doesn't fit in our box, it is suspect and must be discredited!

Guys, that is the world we live in now!

So again I say:

We deny the power of God when we try to reduce it to what we are comfortable with.

So what do we do? Don't get caught up in the rhetoric. Don't spar with the world. Instead, we should have the attitude of the man who was blind.

I love this...let's pick it up at v24:

²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."

²⁵ He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

All I know is...I was blind and now I see.

Guys...that is a testimony! He let the proof of his life-change be his argument!

We must do the same!

Again, I say:

God's power will not be put in a box.

He will not let us box it up, make it predictable and comfortable and controllable. His power is wild and untamed! God will do His work according to His will, and He will not allow us to keep it within our comfort zone or even within our theology!

And that is exactly what the Jewish elders were attempting back in our story in Acts 4 with the man who was lame. Let's get back to that story:

I love this scene in Acts 4. The Jewish elders are in a real pickle. All the people had seen this miracle, and the man that was lame was literally standing right there for all to see. They couldn't deny it.

¹⁵ So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶ "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name."

¹⁸ Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! ²⁰ As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

²¹ After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. ²² For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

Let's unpack this. First of all, notice the heading:

Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin

What is the Sanhedrin? It was the *assembly of the temple elders*.

It was literally the Jewish court system. It was an assembly of 71 sages who met in a special room at the temple. They met daily, except for the sabbath and during festivals. The Sanhedrin was the final authority on Jewish law and anyone who went against its decisions was put to death.

Can you imagine the tradition? The piety? Even the pompous atmosphere in that room? The Sanhedrin had a reputation for being pompous and overextending their authority. They often made judgments and even invoked punishments that weren't as much about God's law as they were about their own agendas and egos.

This was a serious matter for Peter and John. Anyone brought to the Sanhedrin was potentially in real trouble if they didn't say and do the right things.

With that in mind, now, let's look again at Acts 4, v1:

¹ The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people.

OK, the priests and the temple guards, that's easy to picture...but who are the Sadducees?

The Sadducees were the party of high priests, they were mostly from wealthy and aristocratic families. They were politicians who maintained a good relationship with the Roman rulers in that area. They dominated the temple and the priesthood, and claimed that their family lines, and social and economic status gave them their authority.

The Sadducees held tight to the written Torah as the only authority (the first five books of the Old Testament). They didn't believe in the priestly written or oral traditions. ***They were the epitome of legalism.*** They were among the group that John the Baptist called a Brood of Vipers.

Their compromise with the Romans and their haughty and pompous positions caused the common Jew to hate the Sadducees.

But the most interesting thing about the Sadducees was their denial of the resurrection, and of spirits, including demons or angels. More in a minute...

So with all this in mind, you can understand the Sadducee's concern for anything having to do with Jesus, His teachings, or His disciples.

With Jesus Himself, they tested Him several times, trying to catch Him saying something they could convict Him on.

Let's look at this scene in Matthew 22:23-33

²³ That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. ²⁴ "Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him. ²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. ²⁶ The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. ²⁷ Finally, the woman died. ²⁸ Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?"

²⁹ Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. ³⁰ At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. ³¹ But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ³² 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

³³ *When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.*

In this scene the Sadducees asked Jesus a hypothetical question, but notice its ridiculous nature. They were setting Him up, apparently trying to show the nonsense of the idea of the resurrection. But notice, Jesus didn't bite.

Instead, look at what He said.

²⁹ *Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.*

Jesus knew how to go right to the heart of the matter. *You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.*

What a statement to make to the most pompous Jews around. They were the most legalistic and pious Jews around, priding themselves on their knowledge of the law. They saw themselves as God's enforcers. Their religion was their career.

Yet, in all of this...they didn't really *know*.

Is it possible to be guilty of that today? Knowing scripture...memorized, judging others by it, and even making a career of it, but not really *knowing* it...not *living* it...not having any *power* because of it?

You'd better believe it, and we will see even more of it as we approach Jesus' return.

Look at how Paul warned of this:

2 Timothy 3:1-5

¹ *But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.*

Look at that:

⁵ *having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.*

That was a perfect picture of the Sadducees.

But Jesus wasn't done...look what He said next:

³⁰ *At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.*

Jesus was addressing their question of marriage in heaven. But really, if you look closely, He was really making two other emphatic statements.

1. **There is a resurrection**
2. **There are angels**

The Sadducees didn't believe in the supernatural...angels, or the resurrection.

And basically, Jesus was saying “*Here you thought you knew scripture, but you don't because you don't believe in its power*”

One writer put it this way:

*“The Sadducees denied supernatural truths such as the existence of angelic beings and the bodily resurrection. They had a fundamental doubt of **the power of God** to do beyond what they could measure and understand in the material world; many today are like the Sadducees in this respect.”*

The idea being:

If you knew the power of God, you would know that God is able to raise the dead...If you knew the Scriptures, you would know that God will raise the dead.”

Now we understand a little better what was going on in Acts 4, vv1-2

¹ *The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ² They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.*

Now we understand the distress of the Sadducees. Here, these men Peter and John were gathering a crowd with dynamic

teaching...something powerful was going on in the temple courts that they couldn't control. That alone must have driven them nuts.

But it's even more than that...Peter and John were proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

1 Thessalonians 4:14

¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

But here's the rub...the Sadducees knew the law, but did not recognize any of the prophets in the Old Testament who, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, prophesied about the coming Messiah. They didn't believe in Jesus, didn't believe He was the Messiah, didn't believe in the resurrection...didn't believe in the power of God to do the supernatural. They knew the law, they had the right upbringing, they wore the right robes, they talked a good talk, but lacked any power.

And again, it is all about power...power that enables the ordinary to do the extraordinary!

Power to change the world!

1 Corinthians 4:20

²⁰ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

Does your life lack power? Perhaps you should start with the question: *What do I believe about God? I mean really believe?*

The lack of belief by the Sadducees prevented them from having the power that these apostles...these unschooled men Peter and John had.

And did Peter and John have power in this scene? Not only was this lame man miraculously healed, but look at v4 of the main text in Acts 4

⁴ But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

That was an addition of almost 2,000 believers to the kingdom of God!

The resurrection of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the saints is a basic bedrock issue in Christianity. If there is no resurrection, our faith is in vain.

1 Corinthians 15:12-22

The Resurrection of the Dead

¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

11 While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. 12 When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do

you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. 14 You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. 15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. 16 By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

17 "Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. 18 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. 19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. 21 Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. 22 For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. 23 Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.'

24 "Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days. 25 And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' 26 When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

Let's unpack this.

¹¹ *While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade.*

Notice, the man held on to Peter and John. Why was he holding onto them, when he was just walking and jumping and praising God a minute ago? We don't know for sure...but one thing is for sure...he was excited! Remember last week,

² Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.

Look at the intentionality of Luke to point out that the man was born lame. This is all he had ever known! Just imagine that.

We take walking for granted because we have done it all our lives. This man had no basis of understanding of what walking even felt like. He had to be carried everywhere he went...that's all he knew.

Remember...Luke was a doctor. This man having never walked, had never learned to balance himself...his legs had never worked this way! This must've been overwhelming! What a miracle!

But we must get this...

God didn't heal his legs and ankles and then tell him he would need months of rehabilitation to learn to walk. *When God heals it is complete!*

Question: *Is it the same with us?*

God's healing is *correct*...just what we need, His healing is *thorough*...not lacking anything... and His healing is *complete*.

In my own life, God didn't see me 22 years ago as a struggling alcoholic who had just lost everything, and say "*Chris, I'm going to kick start your healing, but you are going to continue to struggle with this and maybe, just maybe, you'll see freedom some day*". He didn't have any intention of partial healing...His healing is complete! He healed me, freed me...I literally haven't had a drink since March 11, 1998 because He did for me what I could not do for myself. I don't even think about alcohol, it is a non issue...I can be in a room full of drinkers and be just fine. And that does happen periodically. He delivered me from that slavery so

that I can in turn minister freedom to others in slavery and present the hope I have...He took the very thing that was devised to destroy me and turned it around for my good and for ministry to others!

What is your story? Did you know God wants to do a miracle in your life, and it won't be just half a miracle, it will be complete!

Jeremiah 17:14

*¹⁴ Heal me, LORD, and I will be healed;
save me and I will be saved,
for you are the one I praise.*

Then notice...

¹¹ ...all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. ¹² When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"

I love the humility displayed here by Peter. Why are you so amazed as if we are magicians or something? This isn't about us at all...this has nothing to do with how spiritual we are...or how powerful we are...

That is a good attitude for us all to have as we move forward...we believe we will see signs and wonders as we step out in faith in what we believe God is calling us to as a church...healings, deliverance, marriages restored...addictions broken...and it will all be by the powerful move of the Holy Spirit, and nothing we can take credit for. Ordinary people doing extraordinary things by the power of the HS!

Moving on:

¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned (rejected) him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. (Pilate had decided he didn't see anything Jesus had done that would merit conviction. The people are the ones who insisted Jesus be crucified

...these very people) ¹⁴ You disowned (rejected...he says it again) the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵ You killed the

author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. (we saw Him with our own eyes...we talked with Him...we saw Him ascend to heaven. The resurrected Jesus appeared to hundreds of witnesses) ¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

Guys...this is a tremendous story about power and grace. There is grace interwoven throughout the Word of God. Have you noticed the grace in this story?

Peter reminds them twice that they were the ones who rejected Jesus and demanded that He be put to death!

It would've been so easy for him to say "You rejected this Jesus. It's on you, and it's too late for you!"

That's probably what his flesh felt like saying. (I know it's what *I* would've probably wanted to say.)

But they were not being led by the flesh...they were being led by the Spirit.

And When we are led by the Spirit we are led by power and grace.

Question: Do we speak with grace? Do we even *offer* grace? Or do we see ourselves as God's enforcers?

Are we quick to correct others? How much from our mouths is corrective?

Do we offer the "shoulda-woulda-coulda's?" Or the "I told you so's?"

Look at the grace offered here...Peter gives them a chance to be saved and experience a time of refreshing.

¹⁹ *Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,*

Times of refreshing?! Are you kidding, after what they did?

Guys, that's grace! Thank God for His grace!

Psalm 103:10

*¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.*

***Do you need a time of refreshing? Hear me...God is not accusing
you...He is calling you to repentance, and to refreshing!***

**OK, so when we are led by the Spirit it means power and grace. We talked
about the grace component...let's finish with the power.**

Peter, being led by the Spirit, said this in Acts 3:16

*¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made
strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely
healed him, as you can all see.*

Did you know: ***Satan does fear you, he fears your power.***

And: ***The most powerful weapon we have is the name of Jesus***

I'm talking about the same Jesus mentioned in Philippians 2:

Philippians 2:6-11

*⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;*

*⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.*

*⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!*

*⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,*

*¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

*¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

I'm talking about Jesus Christ: *And in His name is power!*

His name is above all names! His name is above the devil's....above our brokenness.... above sickness...above shame...above addictions... above worry....above this pandemic

That means that whatever it is...it must give way to the name of Jesus!! A man born lame, an airborne virus, a dying marriage, an addiction...It doesn't matter whether it's from heaven, earth or hell!

There is *nothing* that will demolish strongholds like His name!

It's not about knowing fancy, religious prayers, or even having scripture memorized....it's simply "*Jesus!!*"

Me: whispering "Jesus" (Optional: Story of Nicole)

Did you know the Bible says:

Proverbs 18:21

²¹ *The tongue has the power of life and death*

What comes out of our mouths - has the ability to bring life or death, especially during struggle or upheaval.

Why not let it be the name of Jesus! This world doesn't need your opinion, it needs the name of Jesus!

Social media needs the name of Jesus...your kids need the name of Jesus...the church needs the name of Jesus!

That's what brings power...*that's* what makes us safe.

Question: *When has fear ever made you feel safer? Negativity? Doubt?*

Proverbs 18:10

¹⁰ *The name of the LORD is a strong tower;
the righteous run to it and are safe.*

Now, let me just say this...*your enemy does not want you to know this!*

He doesn't want you to know the power you wield!

He incites worry and fear so you'll get confused and forget this fact!

He'll remind you of your past...and mock your own power!

And He'll tell you you've disqualified yourself from any of God's power

But grace calls even louder...*it's not about your qualifications, it's about Mine!*

So really...Jesus' name give us authority It's like a Holy power of attorney

And lastly...it's **In Jesus' name we are saved.**

Acts 4:12

¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

Acts 2:21

²¹ And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Peter Heals a Lame Beggar

¹ One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ² Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴ Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" ⁵ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶ Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." ⁷ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. ⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹ When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging

at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

As we unpack this tonight, I want to point out a theme here. And this theme will be woven throughout this study of the Book of Acts:

Humanly speaking, the early Christians had nothing going for them. The church was new, with unproven leaders. They weren't educated, they had no money, no modern means for spreading the gospel. They faced incredible opposition and enormous obstacles. Yet they were empowered by the Holy Spirit to do the impossible, including signs and wonders, reaching the lost world with the power and salvation of the gospel. **If this isn't encouraging for us here at Crossover, I don't know what is. God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called. What is going to happen here at Crossover will be a clear work of the Holy Spirit and it will be done through common broken people, amen?!**

Look at how v1 begins:

¹ *One day Peter and John were going up to the temple*

Peter and John...ordinary men...fisherman. Ordinary men doing an ordinary thing...going to the temple to pray...along with everyone else.

But in God's kingdom, any activity has the potential to become a scene where God's extraordinary invades our ordinary.

Church, we have to get this...*God wants to invade our ordinary with His extraordinary!*

These were ordinary men, doing an extraordinary work. What was it that took them into the realm of the extraordinary? The answer is...actually two things.

First of all...*these men had been with Jesus.*

When you have spent time with Jesus...you will change. No one in the gospels who had spent any time with Jesus was ever the same.

Nothing about Jesus is ordinary. Everything about Him is extraordinary. And when you spend time with Jesus, you will experience the extraordinary.

Peter and John heard Jesus teach...they saw the miracles...witnessed first-hand the raising of the Jairus' Daughter. They were the two that Jesus sent into town to make the preparations for the Last Supper. And after the meal itself, John was the one who lounged with his head on Jesus' chest, hearing the very heartbeat of the Maker of the Universe.

They witnessed the agony of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, and they saw first-hand Jesus' Transfiguration on the mountain.

And I want to jump ahead a little to chapter 4, when Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin to answer for the healing of this lame man at the temple gate. Notice what it say...

Acts 4:13

¹³ When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

These men had been with Jesus. And that made all the difference.

Question: Does the world know you have been with Jesus? Kids? Spouse? Neighbors?

Has His extraordinary invaded your ordinary?

I'm just wild-eyed enough to think that if we've been with Jesus, it should show in our attitudes...it should show in how we handle stress...in how we handle fear...in how we handle the quarantine of a pandemic...

Do your actions show that you have spent time with Jesus?

Does your attitude show that you have spent time with Jesus?

Let's re-word those as a question:

*Do my actions show that I have spent time with Jesus?
Does my attitude show that I have spent time with Jesus?*

With that in mind...let's revisit the text:

⁶ Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. (and what did he have? Power from on high) In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." ⁷ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. ⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. (felt need vs real need. Notice he didn't say "hey, this isn't what I was asking for. I asked for money!") ⁹ When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. (nothing is a better testimony than a changed life)

So I said earlier there were two things that took these ordinary men into the realm of the extraordinary. The first...*these men had been with Jesus.*

The second? *They were led by the Spirit*

Romans 8:14

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

We were all created with 5 senses, right? (sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell)

And we instinctually follow them. In fact, I would go so far as to say we are governed by them (led by them, controlled by them)

When we became believers, God gave us a new governing sense

and that is being led by the Spirit

Seeing beyond the ordinary into the extraordinary!

Ephesians 1:18

¹⁸ *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you...*

In other words Paul is saying, “*Look, I’m not expecting you to get this with your physical senses and natural perception. I pray that something greater than you comes and empowers you to see what is unseen...to see beyond the natural...to see beyond circumstances...and to see what God sees*”

I’m talking about a sense that overrides them all, a sense that should govern us in all we do as believers. God gave it to us when we believed. *Peter and John had been with Jesus, and had experienced the infilling of the Spirit in the powerful scene in the upper room. And now they were being led by the Spirit in a direct collision course with a lame man.*

They were about to see the extraordinary invade their ordinary!

Let’s contrast being led by our senses and being led by the Spirit

Our physiological senses are cognitive...and we function in a cognitive process

Cognitive: the mental processes of perception, memory, judgment, and reasoning

Get that: *perception, then judgment*

Our senses are like sensors that perceive stimuli, we then use this stimuli for judgement and reasoning

Sensors: Many of us have parking or driving sensors on our cars.

These sensors constantly send out electronic recognizance signals, analyze the surroundings, and make evaluations to better guide you, giving you a warning when *danger is looming*.

Story of my truck’s faulty sensor (“service driving sensor”)

The problem is that this stupid sensor gave me erroneous information and false danger warnings

So it was useless, I turn it off

Seems pretty funny, and even cut and dry, right? *Just turn it off...*

Yet, in a spiritual sense, we do the same when we listen to our flesh...worry, fear, shame, self-loathing, doubt, failure, when we listen to the past and let it drive our future...these are all driving sensors that have guided us in the past.

They send us what seems like real information, they make judgments of the situations around us, we receive the input and then we adjust our driving – our living -accordingly...i.e. we make assessments and reasoning.

**Hear me: Here we are in the middle of a worldwide pandemic.
We need to hear from God more than ever!**

**We don't need to *service* these old driving sensors, we need to
disable these driving sensors once and for all!**

We instead, are instructed to live a new way...led by the Spirit! (i.e. by faith)

2 Corinthians 5:7

⁷ *For we live by faith, not by sight.*

We are called to trade the seen for the unseen, the predictable for the unpredictable! The ordinary for the extraordinary!

So I say again: *God wants to invade our ordinary with His extraordinary!*

Notice it doesn't say *For we live by taste, by smell, or by feel...*

And we clearly are not to *live by sight*

Instead, we are instructed to do something that is against our nature as humans...to look beyond the seen into the unseen...beyond the comfortable into the uncomfortable

But that's where miracles happen! In the unseen zone, not in the "seen" zone!

Faith doesn't make sense – it makes miracles!

And that is exactly what we see here in this story with Peter and John.

Their choice to walk by faith, being led by the Spirit, placed them right in the crosshairs of heaven invading earth...and a lame man was healed because of it.

And those that saw and recognized this man were filled with wonder and amazement!

I'll close with this question again:

Does the world know you have been with Jesus?

Can the world see that you are led by the Spirit?

Or does it see you being led by something else?

Next week we'll take a look at how Peter addressed the crowd and the Sanhedrin after this miracle.

Peter Speaks to the Onlookers

¹¹ While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. ¹² When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴ You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵ You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

¹⁷ "Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸ But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. ¹⁹ Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰ and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. ²¹ Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. ²² For Moses said, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. ²³ Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people."^[a]

²⁴ "Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days. ²⁵ And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, "Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed."^[b] ²⁶ When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

Footnotes:

a. [Acts 3:23](#) Deut. 18:15,18,19

b. [Acts 3:25](#) Gen. 22:18; 26:4

c. Peter and John were both commissioned by Jesus and recognized by the early Christians as *apostles* – special ambassadors of Jesus. [Acts 2:43](#) told us, *many*

signs and wonders were done through the apostles. [Acts 3](#) tells us of a specific example, one of the *many*.

- d. i. We can think of at least three reasons why Luke found it important to share the story of *this* miracle. First, to give an example of what he mentioned in [Acts 2:43](#). Second, to give an excuse for telling us about another sermon of Peter. Third, to show why these earliest Christians were persecuted, because that is what this beautiful story leads to.
- e. b. **At the hour of prayer:** Apparently Peter and John saw no problem in continuing their Jewish custom of prayer at certain hours of the day.
- f. i. Morgan points out that Peter and John were *not* going to the temple at the hour of *sacrifice*, but **at the hour of prayer** that followed the afternoon sacrifice. They realized that the sacrificial system was fulfilled in the perfect sacrifice Jesus offered on the cross.
- g. ii. Calvin saw a missionary intent in what Peter and John did: “Furthermore, if any man ask, whether the apostles went up into the temple that they might pray according to the rite of the law, I do not think that that is a thing so likely to be true, as they might have better opportunity to spread abroad the gospel.”
- h. iii. **The ninth hour:** “Perhaps this time of day, even then, held special significance for them because it was the hour when Jesus cried from the cross, ‘It is finished’ ([John 19:30](#)).” (Hughes)
- i. c. **The gate of the temple which is called Beautiful:** The Jewish historian Josephus described this gate on the temple mount; made of fine Corinthian brass, seventy-five feet high with huge double doors, so beautiful that it “greatly excelled those that were only covered over with silver and gold.” (Cited in Stott)
- j. d. **A certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried... asked for alms:** The lame man simply wanted to be *supported* in the condition that he was in. God had something better in mind; Jesus wanted to completely change his condition.
- k. i. Of course, the lame man felt he had no other option than to be supported in his condition; and it was certainly better for him to be supported than to starve to death.

- l. ii. In addition, the man had good reason to believe that begging at the **Beautiful** gate could support him. There was (and is) a strong tradition of alms-giving (giving to the poor, especially beggars) in Judaism, and doing it as an act of righteousness.

m. 2. (4-6) What Peter said to the lame man.

- n. **And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, “Look at us.” So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”**
- o. a. **Fixing his eyes on him:** The man must have been happy and encouraged when Peter and John looked at him intently. Most people who want to ignore beggars are careful to not make eye contact with them. When they looked at the lame man so intently, he probably thought he had a big gift coming.
- p. b. **He gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them:** The lame man returned the eye contact with Peter and John; perhaps he stretched out his hand or a cup to receive their generosity.
- q. i. The lame man was correct in **expecting to receive something from them**, but he received much more than the monetary donation he would have been satisfied with!
- r. ii. Many have yet to come to the place where they really expect something from God. This is *faith*, plain and simple – even if the man expected less than Jesus wanted to give.
- s. iii. Better yet, we should expect the right things from God. We are often much too ready to settle for much less than God wants to give to us, and our low expectations often rob us.
- t. c. **Silver and gold I do not have:** Peter didn’t have any money, but he did have authority from Jesus to heal the sick (**what I do have I give to you**). Peter knew what it was like to have God use him to heal others, because Jesus had trained him in this ([Luke 9:1-6](#)).
- u. i. For some people, to say “**silver and gold I do not have**” is about the worst thing that can be said. They feel the church is in ruins if it must say “**silver and**

gold I do not have.” But it is much worse if the church never has the spiritual power to say, **“In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk”**

- v. ii. There is a story – perhaps true – about a humble monk walking with a Roman Catholic cardinal at a time in the Middle Ages when the Roman Catholic church was at its zenith of power, prestige and wealth. The cardinal pointed to the opulent surroundings and said to the monk, “We no longer have to say, **silver and gold I do not have.**” The monk replied, “But neither can you say, **In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.**”
- w. iii. When Peter and John gave him no money, we might have heard the lame man complain: “You don’t care about me. You won’t support me. Look at the mess I’m in.” But Peter and John wanted something greater than supporting the man in his condition. They wanted to transform his life by the power of the risen Jesus Christ.
- x. iv. “It is not the Church’s business in this world to simply make the present condition more bearable; the task of the Church is to release here on earth the redemptive work of God in Christ.” (LaSor)
- y. d. **What I do have I give you:** He gave the lame man power in the name of Jesus, but he could not give it unless *he had it in his own life*. Many people want to be able to say, **“rise up and walk”** without having received the power of Jesus to transform their own life.
- z. i. **In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth:** “Jesus was from Nazareth – he was a Nazarene, and this had been used to insult Christ during his life on earth. But now Peter waved it like a banner.” (Hughes)

aa. 3. (7-10) The healing of the lame man.

- bb. **And he took him by the right hand and lifted *him* up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them; walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.**
- cc. a. **And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up:** It was one thing to say, **“rise up and walk,”** but it was a much greater thing to so boldly take the

man's hand and lift him to his feet. At this moment, Peter received the *gift of faith* described in [1 Corinthians 12:9](#) – a supernatural ability to trust God in a particular situation.

- dd.i. This wasn't something Peter did on a whim or as a promotional event; he did it under the specific prompting of the Holy Spirit. God gave Peter the supernatural ability to trust Him for something completely out of the ordinary.
- ee.b. **Immediately his feet and bones received strength:** Strength did not come to the lame man until Peter said “**rise up and walk,**” and not until Peter **took him by the right hand and lifted him up.**
- ff. i. “Perhaps only medical men can fully appreciate the meaning of these words; they are peculiar, technical words of a medical man. The word translated *feet* is only used by Luke, and occurs nowhere else. It indicates his discrimination between different parts of the human heel. The phrase *ankle-bones* is again a medical phrase to be found nowhere else. The word ‘leaping up’ describes the coming suddenly into socket of something that was out of place, the articulation of a joint. This then is a very careful medical description of what happened in connection with this man.” (Morgan)
- gg.c. **Entered the temple... walking, leaping, and praising God:** As soon as he was healed, the formerly lame man did three good things. First, he attached himself to the apostles (**entered the temple with them**). Secondly, he immediately started to use what God had given him (**walking, leaping**). Finally, he began to praise and worship God (**praising God**).
- hh.d. **Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms:** This man was more than 40 years old ([Acts 4:22](#)), and had been crippled since birth. He was a familiar sight at this temple gate ([Acts 3:10](#)). Therefore, Jesus must have passed him by many times without healing him.
- ii. i. We can say that one Jesus didn't heal his is because God's timing is just as important as His will, and it was for the greater glory of God that Jesus heal this man from heaven through His apostles.

jj. B. Peter preaches to the gathered crowd.

kk. 1. (11-12) Introduction: Why do you think we have done something great?

ll. Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed. So when Peter saw *it*, he responded to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"

mm. a. **Held on to Peter and John:** Since he could walk, it wasn't for support. Perhaps he held on to them out of gratitude, perhaps out of a combined sense of fear and surprise – since a crowd quickly gathered as **the people ran together to them... greatly amazed.**

nn.b. **When Peter saw it, he responded to the people:** Peter wisely took advantage of the gathering crowd. Yet he knew that the phenomenon of the miraculous in itself brought no one to Jesus, it merely aroused interest. Though they were **greatly amazed**, they weren't saved yet.

oo.i. This might have been a good time for a testimony service, for the healed man certainly had a great experience. Yet Peter knew that what the crowd needed to hear – even more than the healed man's experience – was the gospel of Jesus Christ, and a call to repent and believe. The healed man didn't know enough yet to share that, so Peter did the talking.

pp.ii. Peter knew that saving faith did not come by seeing or hearing about miracles, rather *faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* ([Romans 10:17](#)).

qq.c. **Why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?** Peter denied that the healing was due to either his **power or godliness.**

rr. i. Many evangelists or preachers today who would never claim to heal in their own power still give the impression that healing happens because they are so spiritual, so close to God, or so godly. Peter knew that it was all of Jesus and nothing was of him.

ss. d. **Why do you marvel at this?** Peter's point was simple: Jesus healed all sorts of people when He walked this earth, so why should it seem strange that He continues to heal from heaven?

tt. 2. (13-15) *Peter preaches Jesus.*

uu. **“The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let *Him* go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.**

vv. a. **God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:** By opening with this reference to God, Peter made it clear that he spoke to them about the God of Israel, the God represented in the Hebrew Scriptures.

ww. b. **His Servant Jesus:** The greatness of Peter’s sermon is that it was all about Jesus. The focus on the sermon was not on Peter nor on anything he did, but all about Jesus.

xx. i. The first thing Peter said about Jesus in this sermon drew attention to the idea that Jesus was the perfect **Servant** of the Lord, and spoken of in the Hebrew Scriptures (as in [Isaiah 42](#) and [52:13-53:12](#)). “The concept of the ‘servant of the Lord’ was well-known in Israel because of [Isaiah 53](#) and other texts.” (Boice)

yy. c. **Whom you delivered up and denied:** Peter boldly set the guilt of Jesus’ death squarely where it belonged. **Pilate**, the Roman governor, was **determined to let Him go**, but the Jewish mob insisted on the crucifixion of Jesus ([John 18:29-19:16](#)).

zz. i. This does *not* mean that the Jewish people of that day *alone* were responsible for the death of Jesus. The Romans – Gentiles – were also responsible. The Romans would not have crucified Jesus without pressure from the Jewish leaders, and the Jews could not have crucified Jesus without Roman acceptance of it. God made certain that both Jew and Gentile shared in the guilt of Jesus’ death. In fact, it was not political intrigue or circumstances that put Jesus on the cross; it was our sin. If you want to know who put Jesus on the cross, look at me – or look in the mirror.

aaa. ii. Peter was not afraid to confront their sin, and he showed amazing boldness. “One commentator says that the miracle of the speech of Peter is a far more wonderful one than the miracle wrought in the healing of the man who lay at the Beautiful Gate.” (Morgan)

- bbb. iii. Yet notice the contrast. In God's estimation Jesus is the exalted **Servant**, promised centuries before in the Hebrew Scriptures. In man's estimation Jesus was only worthy to be tortured and crucified.
- ccc. d. **Holy One**: Here Peter exalted Jesus as *God*. The term **Holy One** is used more than 40 times in the Old Testament as a high and glorious title for Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel.
- ddd. e. **Asked for a murderer to be granted to you**: One of the ironies of the crucifixion of Jesus is that while the crowd rejected Jesus, they embraced a criminal and a murderer named Barabbas ([Luke 23:13-25](#), [John 18:39-40](#)). Peter *boldly* confronted this audience.
- eee. i. When Peter spoke of sin, he used the word **you** several times. In the sermon on the day of Pentecost it is recorded that he only used it once ([Acts 2:23](#)).
- fff. · **You** *delivered up and denied*.
- ggg. · **You** *denied the Holy One and the Just*.
- hhh. · [You] *asked for a murderer to be granted to you*.
- iii. · [You] *killed the Prince of Life*.
- jjj. f. **And killed the Prince of life**: Of course, **the Prince of life** could not remain in the grave, and the apostles were united **witnesses** of the fact of His resurrection.
- kkk. 3. (16) How the man was healed.**
- lll. **And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.**
- mmm. a. **And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong**: Peter said that it was in the **name** of Jesus that this man has been made whole. This means more than Peter said, "in Jesus name." It means that Peter consciously did this in the authority and power of Jesus, not in the authority and power of Peter. Peter would not even take credit for the *faith* that was exercised in the healing (**yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness**).

nnn. i. "In Semitic thought, a name does not just identify or distinguish a person, it expresses the very nature of his being. Hence the power of the person is present and available in the name of the person." (Longenecker)

ooo. b. **Through faith in His name:** When God's people really do good in this world, they do it **through faith in His name**. The temptation is always to do things trusting in something or someone else.

ppp. · To trust in good intentions.

qqq. · To trust in talents and gifts.

rrr. · To trust in material resources.

sss. · To trust in reputation and prior success.

ttt. · To trust in hard work or smart work.

uuu. i. Instead, we must always trust in and do good **through faith in His name**.

vvv. **4. (17-18) Explaining the sufferings of Jesus.**

www. **Yet now, brethren, I know that you did *it* in ignorance, as *did* also your rulers. But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled."**

xxx. a. **Yet now, brethren:** Though Peter spoke boldly to them about their sin, he didn't hate them. He didn't say, "Yet now, you filthy disgusting wretches." He still connected to them as **brethren**. Notice that twice Peter had accused them of *denying* Jesus (3:13, 14) – something Peter had himself done.

yyy. b. **I know that you did it in ignorance:** Peter recognized they called for the execution of Jesus in ignorance of God's eternal plan. This did not make them innocent, but it did carefully define the nature of their guilt. If we sin in ignorance, it is still sin; but it is different from sin done with full knowledge.

zzz. c. **He has thus fulfilled:** Despite all the evil they did to Jesus, it did not change or derail God's plan. God can take the most horrible evil and use it for good. Joseph could say to his brothers, "*you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good.*" ([Genesis 50:20](#)) The same principle was at work in the crucifixion of Jesus and is at work in our lives ([Romans 8:28](#)).

aaaa. 5. (19-21) Peter calls them to repentance.

bbbb. “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”

cccc. a. **Repent therefore:** As he did in his first sermon ([Acts 2:38](#)), Peter called upon the crowd to **repent**. He told them to turn around in their thinking and actions.

dddd. i. Peter spoke boldly to them about their sin, but he didn’t just want to make them feel bad. That wasn’t the goal. The goal was to encourage them to repent and believe.

eeee. ii. Repentance does not describe being sorry, but describes the act of *turning around*. And as he used it in chapter two, here also Peter made **repent** a word of *hope*. He told them that they had done wrong; but that they could turn it around and become right with God.

ffff. b. **And be converted:** Peter knew the necessity of *conversion*, of God’s work of bringing new life to us. Being a Christian is not “turning over a new leaf,” it is being a *new creation in Christ Jesus* ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)).

gggg. i. Boice says that **be converted** is better translated, “turn to God” – or, even better, “flee to God.” Boice connects this with the imagery of the cities of refuge in the Old Testament, and thinks Peter told them to flee to Jesus as their place of refuge.

hhhh. c. **That your sins may be blotted out:** This was the first *benefit* of repentance Peter presented to them. The one who repents and is converted is forgiven their sins, and the record itself is erased.

iiii. i. **Blotted out:** This has the idea of wiping ink off of a document. Ink in the ancient world had no acid content and didn’t “bite” into the paper. It could almost always be wiped off with a damp cloth. Peter said that God would wipe away our record of sin just like that.

jjjj. d. **So that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord:** This was the second benefit of repenting and turning to God. In speaking of “**times of refreshing**,” Peter referred to the time when Jesus will return and rule the earth in righteousness. Peter went so far as to say, “**that He may send Jesus Christ,**” thus implying that if the Jewish people as a whole repented, God the Father would send Jesus to return in glory.

kkkk. i. Peter made it clear that Jesus will remain in heaven **until the times of restoration of all things**, and since the repentance of Israel is one of the **all things**, there is some sense in which the return of Jesus in glory will not happen until Israel repents.

llll. ii. Peter essentially offered Israel the opportunity to hasten the return of Jesus by embracing Him on a national level, something that must happen before Jesus will return (as in [Matthew 23:37-39](#) and [Romans 11:25-27](#)).

mmmm. iii. One may raise the hypothetical question, *if* the Jews of that day had received the gospel as a whole, would *then* Jesus had returned way back then? Hypothetically, this may have been the case, but there is no point in speculating about something that *didn't happen!*

nnnn. iv. In a lesser (though glorious) sense, God sends **times of refreshing** to His people today. We should pray for and believe God for seasons of revival and **refreshing**.

oooo. **6. (22-26) Peter warns of the danger of rejecting Jesus.**

pppp. **“For Moses truly said to the fathers, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be *that* every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.’ Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one *of you* from your iniquities.”**

- qqqq. a. **For Moses truly said to the fathers:** The Jewish people of Peter's day were aware of this prophecy of Moses (recorded in [Deuteronomy 18:15](#) and [18:18-19](#)), but some thought that the **Prophet** would be someone different than the *Messiah*. Peter made it clear that they are one and the same.
- rrrr. b. **Every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed:** The destruction promised in the prophecy would become the legacy of this generation of Jews. Many of this generation (certainly not all) rejected Jesus twice over.
- ssss. i. This is the third blessing that comes from repenting and turning to God – being *spared* this promised judgment.
- tttt. c. **And of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham:** Hidden in the idea of the promise to Abraham (**all the families of the earth shall be blessed**) and in the words **to you first** is the undeveloped theme of the extension of the gospel to all the world – even to the Gentiles.
- uuuu. d. **Sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities:** This is the fourth blessing that comes from repenting and turning to God. Jesus blesses us from heaven, and does this by **turning** us **away** from our sins. God's desire to bless us and to do good for us also includes His desire to turn us all away from our sins.
- vvvv. i. The lame man at the Beautiful Gate wanted something; but God wanted to give him something much greater. The same was generally true of the Jewish people Peter preached to. They expected the Messiah *in a certain way*, but God wanted to give them something much greater. They looked for a political and military Messiah, and not so much one to turn **every one of you from your iniquities**. It shows how important it is for us to expect the right things from God.

The Fellowship of the Believers

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone

who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

There is no section of scripture that depicts the model of church unity as well as this one. In fact, look at the heading...*The Fellowship of the Believers*

Fellowship...*a friendly association of people who share the same interests.*

That's what fellowship means.

And what were their interests?

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

Their interests were simply: the apostles' teaching, being together, eating together, (ever notice food has a way of bringing people together?) their common interests also included prayer, signs and wonders of God.

Look at that...people from all walks of life...some fisherman, some tax collectors, some carpenters, some married, some not, some with children, some without children, some old, some young...they likely had personal hobbies and interests, things they liked to talk about. Nothing wrong with that...

Then, a powerful move of the Spirit comes in and brings invigorating and liberating new life...and what is the result? They are all suddenly interested in...

the apostles' teaching, being together, eating together, prayer, signs and wonders of God.

Question: *Do you enjoy going to church? Do you desire to be around other believers, or are they are drag to you?*

Psalm 133:1

¹ *How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!*

Another Question: Are you interested in the things of God?

*In an average day, how much do you think about and talk
about God or His Word? How much do you encourage others
in the Lord...in an average day?*

**See, the Bible is intentional to tell us that *these* are the signs of a
healthy and vibrant church...a church that is alive!**

**Is it possible God is calling His church back to this? Back to the
basics?**

**I believe He is. Right in the middle of this pandemic, He is calling His church
back to its first love, back to the *main thing being the main thing.***

**It is easy to drift...to become distracted. It is easy to give in to
paranoia, to negativity...it is easy to look around at society and
circumstances...to worry about our economy and comfort being
interrupted...**

The Old Testament and New Testament both address this quandary:

Jeremiah 2:13

¹³ *“My people have committed two sins:
They have forsaken me,
the spring of living water,
and have dug their own cisterns,
broken cisterns that cannot hold water.*

Revelation 2:2-5

² *I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you
cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles*

but are not, and have found them false. ³ *You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.*

⁴ *Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.* ⁵ *Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.*

Yikes! Look, I am not saying we bury our heads in the sand...we need to stay informed. But I have a question:

Are we interested in what God is doing?

That's the question we should be asking: *God, what are You doing in this? What do You want out of me during this timeout (coach)? How can I be obediently positioned so I can be part of the mighty thing You are doing?*

Have I drifted away from my first love, Lord? Have I lost the sense of awe that I used to have about Your love and grace?

*Turn me around, pick me up. Undo what I've become.
Bring me back to the place of forgiveness and grace.*

*I need You, need Your help, I can't do this myself
You're the only One that can undo what I've become.*

I believe this is where that first church was...that place of awe and obedience...God can work with a church like that!

But is fellowship *really* that important? These days, with technology? Do I really need others?

Look at how clearly the writer of Hebrews grabs this whole idea:

Hebrews 10:19-25

¹⁹ *Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,* ²⁰ *by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,* ²¹ *and since we*

have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Unpack

And getting back to the text, the first church was not only *concerned* about fellowship, prayer, the things of God...but notice the word used in v42:

They devoted themselves

Devote: *to give of one's time or resources*

They were so concerned and committed that they were willing to give of their time and resources.

Boy, that's where the rubber meets the road...someone's time and resources. *These are precious commodities.*

"Time and resources" pick up where lip service leaves off.

If you were to look at a person's calendar and checkbook, you will tell a lot about what is really important to that person.

Let's talk about time for a moment:

Question: *Does your to-do list work for you, or do you work for it?*

God did not call us to be a slave to our schedule

Here is a saying I've found to be true: *You prioritize what is important to you.*

Well, I just don't have time for that...I'm a very busy person...I have to do this or that.

OK, well clearly, the “this or that” is what is important to you

I don't have time for my spouse like I used to. I don't have time for my kids...

Really? You seem to have plenty of time for those other things.

You prioritize what is important to you.

Old saying: *Actions speak louder than words.*

I don't have time to pray and read the Bible.

Really? I say it's the opposite...you don't have time not to pray.

My dad used to say “*If you're too busy to pray, you're too busy.*”

I think God would have us look at what is keeping us so busy. We all have the same 24 hours in a day...it comes down to priorities

You prioritize what is important to you.

And the first church “devoted” themselves, committed their time and resources, to fellowship and the things of God.

Now let's talk about resources. Were they really *that* devoted? Look at v15

⁴⁵ *They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.*

Ummm...that's pretty devoted

Question: *On an average day, do we even think about others with needs?*

This first church not only thought about others in need, but did something about it through sacrifice and generosity.

I believe they had the mindset that said: *“How can I enjoy my blessing when I know my brother or sister in the Lord is in need?”*

These are the signs of a healthy and vibrant church...a church that is alive!

Am I being extreme, or even legalistic?

1 John 3:16-18

¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

So now, you tell me...

One last point as we conclude:

Question: *Did God notice all this? Did all this “devotion” make a difference to God?*

Look at v47: *And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

First of all: Who was it that brought the increase?

And secondly: It is clear that God noticed their programs and their kickin’ coffee shop. He noticed their building program and cool website...

No...it was their *devotion*, He noticed their sense of awe and obedience...He noticed their fellowship, their unity and generosity...

And because of it *He brought the increase*

I say it again...that is a church God can use. I want to be a part of a church like that. How about you?

Next week, Chapter 3

The Message

They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers.

⁴³⁻⁴⁵ Everyone around was in awe—all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met.

⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷ They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.

The Passion Translation

The Community of Believers

⁴² Every believer was faithfully devoted to following the teachings^[bki] of the apostles. Their hearts were mutually linked to one another,^[bi] sharing communion^[bmi] and coming together regularly for prayer.^[bni] ⁴³ A deep sense of holy awe^[bo] swept over everyone, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders.^[bpi] ⁴⁴ All the believers were in fellowship as one body,^[bqi] and they shared with one another whatever they had. ⁴⁵ *Out of generosity* they even sold their assets to distribute the proceeds to those who were in need among them. ⁴⁶ Daily they met together in the temple courts and in one another's homes to celebrate communion. They shared meals together with joyful hearts and tender humility. ⁴⁷ They were continually filled with praises to God, enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord kept adding to their number daily those who were coming to life.^[br]

- a. [Acts 2:42](#) The Greek word *didache* means “skilled instruction and training.”
- b. [Acts 2:42](#) Or “They became partners.”
- c. [Acts 2:42](#) Or “breaking of bread.” This was more than sharing meals, but participating together in observing the Lord’s Table. The Aramaic, which can be translated “the Eucharist” or “holy communion,” makes it even more explicit.
- d. [Acts 2:42](#) Or “[all kinds of] prayers.”
- e. [Acts 2:43](#) Or “Fear [of God] came upon every person.”
- f. [Acts 2:43](#) The Aramaic adds, “in Jerusalem,” which is missing in the Greek.
- g. [Acts 2:44](#) Or “added into one body.”
- h. [Acts 2:47](#) As translated from the Aramaic. The Aramaic word for “church” is the joining of “meet” and “come.” This word is an invitation to enter into fellowship with Christ and his people. The Greek word for “church” is *ekklesia*, which is “called-out ones.” (See the second footnote on [Matt. 16:18](#).)

Matthew 16:13-18

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

¹⁴ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

¹⁵ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷ Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter,^[bi] and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades^[ci] will not overcome it.

Passion Translation

¹⁸ I give you the name Peter, a stone.^[a] And this truth of who I am will be the bedrock foundation on which I will build my church—my legislative assembly,^[a] and the power of death^[a] will not be able to overpower it!^[a]

Matthew 16:18 Or “all the forces of hell will never have the power to win a victory over it!” There is no power of darkness that can stop the advancing church that Jesus builds.

a. **And they continued steadfastly:** On the day of Pentecost the sound of the rushing wind, the tongues of fire, and the conversion of 3,000 were all remarkable events. But the things described in Acts 2:42 were the abiding legacy of God’s work.

b. **They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine:** They relied on the apostles to communicate to them who Jesus was and what He had done. They just trusted in Jesus; now they wanted to know more.

i. **Continued steadfastly** uses a Greek verb communicating “a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action.” (Longenecker) There was to be no departure from the **apostles’ doctrine**, because it was the truth of God.

ii. Thankfully, God allows us to sit under the **apostles’ doctrine** – the New Testament record. Every pastor should seek to be unoriginal in the sense that we don’t have our own doctrine, but the **apostles’ doctrine**.

c. **They continued in steadfastly in...fellowship:** The ancient Greek word *koinonia* (translated here as **fellowship**) has the idea of association, communion, fellowship, and participation; it means to *share* in something.

i. The Christian life is meant to be full of **fellowship**, of sharing one with another.

- We share the same Lord Jesus.
- We share the same guide for life.
- We share the same love for God
- We share the same desire to worship Him.
- We share the same struggles.
- We share the same victories
- We share the same job of living for Him.
- We share the same joy of communicating the gospel.

d. **They continued in steadfastly...in the breaking of bread:** Even living so close to the time when Jesus was crucified, they still never wanted to forget what He did on the cross. How much more important is it for us to never forget?

e. **They continued in steadfastly... in prayers.** Whenever God's work is done, God's people gather for prayer and worship.

i. "In the Greek the definite article occurs before the word 'prayer.' The text actually says, 'to the prayers.' They devoted themselves 'to *the* breaking of bread and to *the* prayers.' Obviously, that is a reference to something formal – to worship in which the people got together and praised God." (Boice)

f. **The apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers:** Everything else we read about the power and glory of the early church flows from this foundation of the word, fellowship, remembrance of Jesus' work on the cross, and prayer.

i. From Luke's description of the early Christian community, "The educated reader would have got the impression here that the Greek ideal of society had been realized." (Dictionary of New Testament Theology)

ii. "It is presented as a model church, but this does not mean that it was perfect. A few chapters further on, we are going to find that it was far from perfect." (Boice)

2. (43) The presence of the power of God.

Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

a. **Then fear came upon every soul:** This was evidence of the power of God. One of the greatest, most powerful works God can do is to change the human heart towards a reverent honor of the Lord.

b. **Many signs and wonders were done:** This was evidence of the power of God. Where God is at work, lives will be touched in miraculous ways.

3. (44-45) Their close hearts and sharing in the common life of Jesus.

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

a. **Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common:** With the influx of more than 3,000 believers, most of whom stayed in Jerusalem and didn't have jobs, the family of Christians *had* to share if they were to survive.

i. We shouldn't regard this as an early experiment in communism because it was *voluntary*, *temporary*, and *flawed* to the extent that the church in Jerusalem was in continual need of financial support from other churches. Also, we don't have any evidence this continued very long.

b. **All who believed were together:** The Jews had a tremendous custom of hospitality during any major feast like Pentecost. Visitors were received into private homes, and no one could charge for giving a bed or a room to a visitor or for supplying their basic needs. The Christians took this tremendous feast-time hospitality and made it an everyday thing.

c. **Sold their possessions and their goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need:** The power of God is evident here because Jesus became much more important to them than their possessions.

4. (46-47) The Christian family lived together and grew.

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

a. **So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house:** The church is meant to worship God and learn His Word together. Yet it is meant to do more; God wants us to share our *lives* with one another.

b. **Praising God and having favor with all the people:** Their Christian experience was daily, joyful and simple – good examples for us to follow.

c. **And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved:** This is God's prescription for church growth. If we take care to follow the example of [Acts 2:42-47a](#), God will take care of growing the church Himself.

ellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. 23 This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. 25 David said about him:

“I saw the Lord always before me.

Because he is at my right hand,

I will not be shaken.

26 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;

my body also will rest in hope,

27 because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,

you will not let your holy one see decay.

28 You have made known to me the paths of life;

you will fill me with joy in your presence.’

29 *“Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. 30 But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. 31 Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. 32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. 33 Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. 34 For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,*
“The Lord said to my Lord:
“Sit at my right hand
35 *until I make your enemies*
a footstool for your feet.””
36 *“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”*
37 *When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”*
38 *Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”*
40 *With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

There is a lot here. We saw last week that it was God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge to send Jesus to die for us. He did it out of His amazing love.

And now in v24 Peter says *24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*

As I pondered this, I realized some things about the grave. What is the grave? An end...at least in the physical sense of our lives here on earth.

But also, the grave silences. Like nothing else. When a body dies and is laid in a grave, it is silenced, right?

Peter is explaining that these people saw Jesus, they saw His miracles, they heard His teachings...but they could not tolerate them. And even though they demanded Jesus be crucified and therefore silenced forever, Jesus could not be silenced and bound by the grave. Death could not hold Him! Instead, He triumphed over it!

32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. 33 Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

They lost! Jesus cannot be silenced! Their plan backfired...God took what the enemy meant for evil and turned it for good! And He still does it today, amen?

I believe if we are obedient and seeking God during this time instead of looking around and wringing our hands, He will take this pandemic...this holy timeout we are in, and use it for our good!

Now I want to address how Peter tied in what David said

Acts 2 25 *David said about him:*

“I saw the Lord always before me.

Because he is at my right hand,

I will not be shaken.

26 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;

my body also will rest in hope,

27 because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,

you will not let your holy one see decay.

28 You have made known to me the paths of life;

you will fill me with joy in your presence.’

This is a reference to Psalm 16.

And in vv34&35 of Acts 2

34 For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

“The Lord said to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand

35 until I make your enemies

a footstool for your feet.”’

This is a reference to Psalm 110.

What is Peter doing? First of all, he is showing the people that this is all happening according to scripture. He had already quoted Joel earlier addressing their sarcastic comments about them being drunk.

Now he is explaining that everything that had happened was in fulfillment of prophecies spoken hundreds of years earlier by David.

Notice: Acts 2

29 “Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. 30 But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. 31 Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay.

David, in these Psalms, spoke as a prophet about the coming Messiah. The Old Testament is chock full of prophecies given about the coming Messiah, by several different prophets. Over 320 prophecies, to be exact.

Josh McDowell said:

The Old Testament is like an intricate jigsaw puzzle. The numerous pieces, on their own, are puzzling — until they are assembled enough to fill out the intended picture. Thus, the New Testament is the decryption key for unlocking Old Testament meaning.

Jesus Christ unlocked this mystery by fulfilling every single one of them. Not one was missed.

No person that ever walked the face of the earth has impacted humanity like Jesus Christ. He is still to this day the single person in recorded history with the most influence on people, culture, governments, ethics, education, and even entertainment. Even our calendar is based around His birth. BC means “before Christ” and AD means *Anno Domini*, latin for “In the year of our Lord”.

The magazines *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report*, have had Jesus on their covers over 25 times. Time magazine alone has had covers relating to Christianity more than 65 times.

H.G. Wells, known for such works as *The Time Machine*, *The Invisible Man*, *War of the Worlds*, wrote a 1200 page work titled "The Outline of History." Wells was a Darwin supporter, and not a believer. Upon completion of the manuscript, he himself was startled to find that two pages had been devoted to his hero, Plato, but a total of forty-one pages devoted to Jesus Christ - larger than any other historical figure in the work.

Whether you love Him, hate Him, or are indifferent, you must do something with Jesus Christ. He is a polarizing figure like none other in the history of man. In the culture we live in, many people have no problem with the idea or mention of God. But when Jesus is mentioned, that's when lines are drawn, controversy brews, and even wars erupt.

Terry Sartain, police chaplain in Charlotte, N.C., and a member of the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team that served at the Virginia Tech shooting in Blacksburg, Va., in 2007, was given the news three days before a promotion ceremony that there was a change in policy - He could no longer pray in Jesus' name during public events held on government property. He was told by his superiors he had 24 hours to consider his decision. He responded by saying he didn't need 24 hours. He didn't need 24 seconds.

"The only thing I have to offer is Jesus," said Sartain, who asked to be excused from giving the invocation.

Question: *Who do you say that Jesus is?*

Putting aside the spiritual aspects of the question, let's look at some empirical data....purely numbers: A scientist named Professor Stoner started with the number 8. What are the odds of one man fulfilling 8 prophecies exactly? 1×10^{17} (1 in 100,000,000,000,000)

To give you an idea of those odds...If we take 1×10^{17} silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas, they'll cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass of silver dollars thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance would he have of getting the right one?

Professor Stoner went on to consider 48 prophecies and says, "... We find the chance that any one man fulfilled all 48 prophecies to be 1 in 10¹⁵⁷.

This is approximately **the total number of electrons in all the mass of the known universe**. In other words the probability of Jesus Christ fulfilling 48 prophecies is the same as one person being able to pick out one electron out of the entire mass of our universe.

These are the same odds of any one man fulfilling any 48 prophecies. Yet Jesus Christ fulfilled not just 8 or even 48 prophecies, but **more than 324 individual prophecies** that the Prophets wrote concerning the Messiah.

Given the odds, are you ready to bet against Jesus?

You see...the biography of Jesus isn't just the nice story about a good man who is misunderstood and mistakenly killed by evil people.

His death was no accident. It had been planned since the beginning of time.

We didn't deserve His sacrifice because we are good people, and we didn't do anything to twist God's arm. Jesus gave Himself willingly.

Isaiah 53:10 The Message (MSG)

*¹⁰Still, it's what God had in mind all along,
to crush him with pain.*

*The plan was that he give himself as an offering for sin
so that he'd see life come from it—life, life, and more life.
And God's plan will deeply prosper through him.*

Now I ask again...who do you say that Jesus is? What will you do with Him?

Getting back to the text to wrap up, we see what the crowd did in Acts 2:

37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

i. **Having loosed the pains of death:** In the phrase **pains of death**, the word **pains** is actually the word for “birth pains.” In this sense, the *tomb* was a *womb* for Jesus.

ii. “It was not possible that the chosen one of God should remain in the grip of death; ‘the abyss can no more hold the Redeemer than a pregnant woman can hold the child in her body.’” (Bruce, quoting Bertram)

4. (25-33) Quoting [Psalm 16](#), Peter explains the resurrected Jesus.

“For David says concerning Him:

**‘I foresaw the LORD always before my face,
For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.
Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad;
Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope.
For You will not leave my soul in Hades,
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.
You have made known to me the ways of life;
You will make me full of joy in Your presence.’**

“Men *and* brethren, let *me* speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

a. **For David says concerning Him:** Peter recognized that though this Psalm spoke of David, it spoke of someone greater than David – the Messiah, Jesus the Christ. Jesus

may have taught Peter this when He instructed the disciples in the Scriptures ([Luke 24:44-45](#)).

b. **Your Holy One:** Jesus bore the full wrath of God on the cross, *as if* He were a guilty sinner, guilty of *all* our sin, even being made sin for us ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)). Yet, that work was an act of holy, giving love for us, so that Jesus Himself did not become a sinner, even though He bore the full *guilt* of our sin.

i. This is the gospel message; that Jesus took our punishment for sin on the cross and remained a perfect Savior through the whole ordeal – *proved* by His resurrection. Apart from the resurrection, we would have no *proof* that Jesus successfully, perfectly, paid for our sins.

c. **Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption:** Because Jesus bore our sin without becoming a sinner, He remained the **Holy One**, even in His death. Since it is incomprehensible that God's Holy One should be bound by death, the resurrection was absolutely inevitable.

i. Instead of being punished for His glorious work on the cross, Jesus was rewarded, as prophetically described in the Psalm: **You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.**

d. **David... is both dead and buried:** Peter points out that this Psalm cannot be speaking of its human author, **David** – he is dead and remains buried. The Psalm must speak prophetically of the Messiah, Jesus.

e. **This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses:** Jesus of Nazareth, the man they all knew (*as you yourselves also know*, [Acts 2:22](#)), was the one who fulfilled this prophetic Psalm. How did Peter know this? He saw the resurrected Jesus! The basic *evidence* of the resurrection was simply the report of reliable eyewitnesses: **Of which we are all witnesses.**

f. **He poured out this which you now see and hear:** Peter affirms that what the crowd saw was the work of the risen and ascended Jesus, who has sent His Holy Spirit upon His church.

5. (34-36) Quoting [Psalm 110](#), Peter explains the Divine Messiah.

For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself:

**‘The LORD said to my Lord,
“Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”’**

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

a. **The LORD said to my Lord:** This begins the third Old Testament passage Peter used in his sermon, [Psalm 110:1](#). This verse of the Old Testament is quoted in the New Testament more than any other single verse; either quoted or referred to at least 25 times. In this Psalm, David understood and proclaimed the *deity* of the Messiah.

i. In this Psalm, King David – by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – recorded that Yahweh, Israel’s covenant God (**TheLORD**), spoke to David’s Lord (**my Lord**) as God. Peter used this to show that the Messiah, who is the focus of [Psalm 110](#), is in fact Divine – He is God.

b. **Therefore let all the house of Israel know:** The sermon concludes with a summary. Simply, all Israel should know that even though they crucified Jesus, God has declared Him **both Lord and Christ**.

i. It is as if Peter said, “You were all wrong about Jesus. You crucified Him as if He were a criminal, but by the resurrection, God proved that He is Lord and Messiah.”

ii. When Peter exhorted them *whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved* ([Acts 2:21](#)), there is little doubt who the **Lord** is that he spoke of: **Jesus**.

iii. “That the early Christians meant to give Jesus the title *Lord* in this highest sense of all is indicated by their not hesitating on occasion to apply to him passages of Old Testament scripture referring to Yahweh.” (Bruce)

C. The response to Peter’s preaching.

1. (37) *They respond with a question: What shall we do?*

Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?”

a. **Now when they heard this...**“What shall we do?” This was obviously a significant work of the Holy Spirit. The great crowd listening to Peter was deeply moved by Peter’s bold proclamation of the truth. *They* asked Peter how they should respond.

i. It is wrong to think that Peter offered no kind of invitation or challenge for his listeners to respond. [Acts 2:40](#) says, *And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”* Peter clearly did exhort them to respond, and invited his listeners to “*Be saved.*” Nevertheless, the multitude responded with remarkable initiative.

ii. The response of the crowd also helps us to put the events of that Day of Pentecost into perspective. The exercise of the gift of tongues produced nothing in the listeners except for astonishment and mocking. It wasn’t until the gospel was preached that conviction from the Holy Spirit came. This was the work God really wanted to accomplish.

b. **Cut to the heart:** This is a good way of describing the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They now knew that they were responsible for the death of Jesus (as each of us are), and that they had to *do* something in response to this responsibility.

i. Peter had some previous experience with cutting. When Jesus was arrested, Peter cut off the right ear of one of the men who came to arrest Jesus ([John 18:10](#)). All this was an embarrassing mess that Jesus had to clean up. That showed Peter in the flesh, doing the best *he* could with a literal sword of human power.

ii. When the resurrected Jesus changed Peter's life and when the power of the Holy Spirit had come upon him, he did some much more effective cutting; cutting hearts, opening them to Jesus. This is what Peter could do in the power of the Spirit, doing God's *best* with the sword of the Spirit, God's Word. Which sword was more powerful?

c. **Men and brethren, what shall we do?** When God is working on someone's heart, they *want* to come to Him; they will act to come to God.

i. It has been said that in normal seasons of Christian work the evangelist seeks the sinner. Yet in times of revival or awakening, things change: the sinner seeks the evangelist. This Day of Pentecost in [Acts 2](#) was one of those great seasons of God's work.

2. (38-40) Peter invites the multitude to come to Jesus.

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation."

a. **Then Peter said to them:** This was in response to the question, "*What shall we do?*" Peter must have been pleasantly amazed to see what God had done in this situation. Instead of people wanting to crucify him because of Jesus, thousands of people wanted to trust in Jesus as Lord and Messiah.

b. **Repent, and let every one of you be baptized:** Responding to the question, "*What shall we do?*" Peter gave them something to *do*. This means that we must *do* something to be saved, we must *do* something to follow Jesus; it doesn't just "happen."

i. Peter *did not* say, "There's nothing you can do. If God saves you, you're saved. If God doesn't save you, you'll never be saved." Though it was true that only God could do the saving, the people had to receive through repentance and faith, faith leading to action such as baptism.

c. **Repent:** The first thing Peter told them to *do* is **repent**. To repent does not mean to feel sorry, but it means to change one's mind or direction. They had thought a certain way about Jesus before, considering Him worthy of crucifixion. Now they must turn their thinking around, embracing Jesus as Lord and Messiah.

i. **Repent** sounds like such a harsh word in the mouths of many preachers and in the ears of many listeners, but it is an essential aspect of the gospel. **Repent** has been rightly called "the first word of the gospel."

ii. When John the Baptist preached he said, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*" ([Matthew 3:2](#)). When Jesus began to preach He said, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*" ([Matthew 4:17](#)). Now when Peter began to preach, he started with **repent**.

iii. Repentance must never be thought of as something we must do *before* we can come back to God. Repentance describes what coming to God is. You can't turn *towards* God without turning *from* the things He is against.

iv. In this sense, **repent** is a word of great hope. It says, "You don't have to continue the way you've been going, you can turn to God."

v. "The old-fashioned grace of repentance is not to be dispensed with; there must be sorrow for sin; there must be 'a broken and a contrite heart.' This, God will not despise; but a 'conversion' which does not produce this result, God will not accept as genuine." (Spurgeon)

d. **Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ:** This was the second thing Peter said they must do. For them to **be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ** was an expression of their belief and complete trust in Him.

i. Baptism made a clear statement. In that day, Jews were not commonly baptized, only Gentiles who wanted to become Jews. For these Jewish men and women to be baptized showed just how strongly they felt they needed Jesus.

ii. “While baptism with water was the expected symbol for conversion, it was not an indispensable criterion for salvation.” (Longenecker)

e. **The promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off:** As they repented and demonstrated faith and obedience by baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit would be given to them as it was given to the original group of disciples. Peter also specifically promised that the **promise** of the Holy Spirit would be given to those who believe in all succeeding generations (**all who are afar off**).

i. They saw the glorious work of the Holy Spirit among the disciples, and Peter told them that it was something that these people could take part in; they didn’t only have to be observers. And since the promise is for **all who are afar off**, it includes all people up to the present time.

ii. It is also important to note that Peter did not say that the unbelieving, unaware **children** of his listeners should be baptized. He simply said that the promise of **the remission of sins** and the **gift of the Holy Spirit** were for *all* who would repent and believe with active faith, even to coming generations and **all who are afar off, as many as the Lord God will call**.

iii. “That is to say, that great covenant promise, ‘Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved,’ is meant for you, is meant for your children, is meant for Hottentots, is meant for Hindoos, is meant for Greenlanders, is meant for everybody to whom the Lord’s call is addressed.” (Spurgeon)

f. **And with many other words he testified and exhorted them:** Peter’s sermon didn’t end there. He continued to urge the crowd to come to Jesus in repentant surrender.

g. **Be saved from this perverse generation:** Any generation that is responsible for putting Jesus to death is a **perverse generation**. But since *every* generation is responsible for Jesus’ death, every generation needs salvation.

3. (41) *The response to Peter's sermon.*

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

a. **About three thousand souls were added to them:** This day of Pentecost saw an amazing harvest of souls. The church went from about 120 people to 3,120 people in one day.

i. Think of how this touched lives beyond that one day. Many of the 3,000 were undoubtedly pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. They expected something special from God, but not anything like this. Many in this crowd went back home, traveling far from Jerusalem, taking the good news of Jesus Christ with them.

b. **Those who gladly received his word were baptized:** Those who believed on Jesus that day did so **gladly**, even making a dramatic statement in baptism. They would not have submitted to baptism unless they were fully convinced of who Jesus was and their great need for Him as a Savior.

i. How could you baptize 3,000 people? There were huge resources of water available on the temple mount, and pools and reservoirs nearby, so it was not difficult to find a place where the baptisms could take place.

ii. God continues to do such great things. After the 1990 Summer Harvest Crusade, there was a mass baptism at Corona del Mar. They couldn't count how many were baptized, but more than 5,000 people attended the event. It was reported as the largest baptism service in American history.

D. The life of these first believers.

1. (42) *The foundation of their Christian life.*

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

a. **And they continued steadfastly:** On the day of Pentecost the sound of the rushing wind, the tongues of fire, and the conversion of 3,000 were all remarkable events. But the things described in [Acts 2:42](#) were the abiding legacy of God's work.

b. **They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine:** They relied on the apostles to communicate to them who Jesus was and what He had done. They just trusted in Jesus; now they wanted to know more.

i. **Continued steadfastly** uses a Greek verb communicating "a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action." (Longenecker) There was to be no departure from the **apostles' doctrine**, because it was the truth of God.

ii. Thankfully, God allows us to sit under the **apostles' doctrine** – the New Testament record. Every pastor should seek to be unoriginal in the sense that we don't have our own doctrine, but the **apostles' doctrine**.

c. **They continued in steadfastly in...fellowship:** The ancient Greek word *koinonia* (translated here as **fellowship**) has the idea of association, communion, fellowship, and participation; it means to *share* in something.

i. The Christian life is meant to be full of **fellowship**, of sharing one with another.

- We share the same Lord Jesus.
- We share the same guide for life.
- We share the same love for God
- We share the same desire to worship Him.
- We share the same struggles.
- We share the same victories
- We share the same job of living for Him.

· We share the same joy of communicating the gospel.

d. **They continued in steadfastly...in the breaking of bread:** Even living so close to the time when Jesus was crucified, they still never wanted to forget what He did on the cross. How much more important is it for us to never forget?

e. **They continued in steadfastly... in prayers.** Whenever God's work is done, God's people gather for prayer and worship.

i. "In the Greek the definite article occurs before the word 'prayer.' The text actually says, 'to the prayers.' They devoted themselves 'to *the* breaking of bread and to *the* prayers.' Obviously, that is a reference to something formal – to worship in which the people got together and praised God." (Boice)

f. **The apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers:** Everything else we read about the power and glory of the early church flows from this foundation of the word, fellowship, remembrance of Jesus' work on the cross, and prayer.

i. From Luke's description of the early Christian community, "The educated reader would have got the impression here that the Greek ideal of society had been realized." (Dictionary of New Testament Theology)

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3. (44-45) *Their close hearts and sharing in the common life of Jesus.*

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c. **Sold their possessions and their goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need:** The power of God is evident here because Jesus became much more important to them than their possessions.

4. (46-47) *The Christian family lived together and grew.*

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

- a. **So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house:** The church is meant to worship God and learn His Word together. Yet it is meant to do more; God wants us to share our *lives* with one another.
- b. **Praising God and having favor with all the people:** Their Christian experience was daily, joyful and simple – good examples for us to follow.
- c. **And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved:** This is God's prescription for church growth. If we take care to follow the example of [Acts 2:42-47a](#), God will take care of growing the church Himself.

Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³ This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Let's begin to unpack this:

So Peter is speaking to the crowd and saying that Jesus' authority was clearly given by God and clearly displayed for all to see. They themselves saw it. *as you yourselves know.* But last week, we saw there is a difference between *knowing* Jesus and *knowing of* Jesus. These people clearly didn't *know* Him.

Peter reminded them bluntly they were the ones who crucified Jesus.

Let's take a look at Matthew 27:19-26

19 While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him."

20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

21 "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor. "Barabbas," they answered.

22 "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" Pilate asked. They all answered, "Crucify him!"

23 "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

24 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!"

25 All the people answered, "His blood is on us and on our children!"

26 Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

So that was the scene. And many of those same people are here now in Acts 2 listening to Peter speak. By the way...can you see the grace here? I hadn't noticed this before, but they said "*His blood is on us and on our children!*".

It would've been so easy for Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to take them up on that and invoke revenge. But instead, as we will see, they were given the opportunity to repent and be forgiven.

Aren't you glad God doesn't hold your past against you?

Now, I want us to notice something else that Peter said...a curious statement:

23 This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge

Notice that: *God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge*

What is this about? I want to introduce two concepts to you that are very important for a believer to understand: *Providence*, and *free will*. (don't worry, we are not going to get hung up in an argument about predestination)

Providence:

The foreseeing care and guidance of God; a manifestation of divine care or direction.

God's providence...perhaps you have experienced it. When things line up in such a way that they can't be written off as coincidence. Many of us have experienced this...when God masterfully creates a complicated matrix of "coincidences" that all work together in our lives, and when we look back we have to conclude that we've just experienced a "God-thing"

Free will: You know what free will is. But the question is...*does free will negate God's providence?* I submit to you that it is NOT in conflict with God's providence, but actually part *of it*.

***In short, I believe God gives us the freedom to choose, but in His omniscience and foreknowledge, He already knows which way we will choose, and uses it as part of His plan.**

For us, it is always a matter of choice. God gave us a mind that has the ability to choose. Triune beings...body, soul, spirit. *It is in our minds that we decide what we believe to be true!*

In the gospels it says that Jesus did things "*in order to fulfill the prophecy spoken.*" Some of these prophecies are very specific and involve free decisions of people...*people that did not acknowledge God*, much less were they concerned about what was spoken in scripture. For example, when Jesus was crucified:

John 19:28-30

²⁸ Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." ²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. ³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

In this story, an unbelieving Roman guard freely chose to give Jesus vinegar instead of water. *He had no idea he was a player in God's story.* John points out that this was prophesied in the past, before Jesus was even born.

Where was it prophesied?

Psalm 69:21

²¹ *They put gall in my food
and gave me vinegar for my thirst.*

OK, OK, what am I saying? Providence can simply be thought of as *God's story*

It's all God's story! And God does not miss one detail! If He did, He would not be God! That is why every one of the prophecies about Jesus had to be fulfilled, because it is God - and He is perfectly sovereign! Perfectly!

Do you get this? If one detail was missed or left unfulfilled, there would be room for doubt.

Question: *Is there one detail of your life that has fallen into the cracks with God?*

This is perfect timing for this teaching with this pandemic. God is not the author of pandemics and calamity. However, in His foreknowledge, He knew about it and has a great plan for you in it.

Again, I encourage you during this time, be a God-chaser...don't be idle during this time...redeem this time...better yourself, grow in grace...let God change something in you during this time. That is part of His plan. *What are you willing to lay down during this?*

So, here's another question: *Are you living God's story, or are you still trying to write your own story?*

And getting back to our story in Acts 2, Peter says:

²³ *This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge*

Deliberate plan?

Question: *Was it always God's plan for Jesus to be crucified?*

Isaiah 53:3-11

³ *He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.*

⁴ *Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.*

⁵ *But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.*

⁶ *We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

⁷ *He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*

⁸ *By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.*

⁹ *He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.*

¹⁰ *Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.*

¹¹ *After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.*

And Jesus Himself knew full well why He came:

Luke 9:22

²² *And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."*

So, if God in His foreknowledge, knew that His own Son Jesus would be killed, why would He deliberately send Him? It seems to me God would say "Oh no, I'm not going to send you down there, Jesus...they'll just kill you."

But God did in fact send His Son to die. Why would He do that?

Simply this: *Because of His absolute love for you...for me.*

John 3:16-17

¹⁶ *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* ¹⁷ *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

Sin entered the world in the Garden with Adam and Eve, and we were forever changed. The Bible says the wages of sin is death. God loved us and desired relationship with us, He doesn't want us to die or be separated from Him. So He gave them the law that spelled out His will for us.

But the problem is...we don't have it in us to live sinless lives on our own. We cannot follow the law perfectly...we sin. What can be done about that? The Bible also says without sacrifice, the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin. And again, God doesn't want us to die or be separated from Him. So He gave His people the plan of sacrifice at the altar for the atoning of sins. It had to be an animal without blemish. Once a year the high priest could enter the Holiest of Holies, carrying the blood of the sacrifice, and receive atonement for the people.

However, the process of sacrifice was flawed, because it took care of the people's sin, but it didn't change their hearts. They were still prone to sin. The sacrifice was necessary over and over again.

Because God in His providence knew this about us, and yet still desired relationship with us, He ended the need for the vicious cycle by sending His Son to take care of it once and for all. Jesus was made as man, but had no sin.

2 Corinthians 5:21

²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin^[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Footnotes:

- a. 2 Corinthians 5:21 Or *be a sin offering*

He was completely pure and spotless. He was the only One to ever walk the face of the earth who did not deserve death, yet He willingly took the sins of the world – your sin, my sin – on Himself and died as the Spotless Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. He did it because of His amazing love and desire to be “at one” with us. Through His sacrifice, all who believe in Him are able to receive forgiveness and atonement.

Romans 10:9

⁹ If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

A quick recap of what Peter has said in this impromptu sermon up to this point:

He addressed the amazing outpouring of the Holy Spirit as foretold by the prophet Joel.

He addressed the prophecies, visions, and dreams

He gave the invitation by saying *And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*

And now, he is bringing it all into context...and the context is *Jesus Christ!*

It was all about Jesus. Without Jesus leaving His heavenly place of glory and coming to dwell among us...without Jesus living as man, fully human, but without sin...with Jesus dying on the cross for our sins...without Jesus being resurrected from the dead, breaking the power of sin and death, without Jesus Christ, it was all just a bunch of hype.

It's always been about Jesus, and it's all about Jesus today. He doesn't come and go with worldly fashion. He is not threatened or surprised by this

pandemic, He hasn't abdicated His throne for one moment, Satan couldn't stop Him and the grave couldn't hold Him! Ain't no grave could hold His body down! He doesn't rise and fall like the stock market...there is nothing in this world more relevant right now than Jesus Christ.

Give me Jesus, give me Jesus. You can have all this world...

Hebrews 13:8

⁸ *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*

Philippians 2:6-11

⁶ *Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;*

⁷ *rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.*

⁸ *And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!*

⁹ *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,*

¹⁰ *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

¹¹ *and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

Now, notice what Peter says at the end of v22:

as you yourselves know.

Remember, this is taking place 30-40 days after Jesus had been crucified. These people were there...they saw Jesus...they saw Him do miracles...they heard His teachings...they heard His wisdom...they witnessed His compassion...they saw Him crucified...they saw the sky turn dark...they saw

the curtain of the temple torn in two from top to bottom. They felt the earth shake and heard the rocks split.

But apparently...all this *seeing* and *hearing* did not translate to them *knowing* Jesus.

There's a difference between *hearing* about Jesus and *knowing* Jesus.

I'm talking about...knowing Him intimately.

Jesus said:

John 8:32

³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Remember...intentionality: Notice He said "You will *know* the truth"

Notice is does not say "*You will hear the truth, and the truth...*"

It doesn't say "*just read a good book, listen to KLOVE or a good CD and will be free*"

It doesn't say "*Just watch some inspirational stuff on Facebook or YouTube and you will be free.*"

This is not about warm and fuzzies, and it is not a spectator sport!

We are set free when we *know* the truth.

Guys - it is in the *knowing*!

*Then you will **know** the truth, and the truth will set you free.*

Know: to have learned something, to have a working understanding, to have experience with something

(story of my girls' hands in truck)

And in a Biblical sense, the definition goes even deeper:

Even the best of human intimacy between a man and his wife pales in comparison with the kind of intimacy God wants to have with us...the way He wants to know us and for us to know Him.

Jeremiah 1:5

⁵ *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you...*

That word “knew” in the Hebrew has deep meaning. It indicates a careful choosing, a setting apart, a crafting as in an artist...in other words...**God dreamed about you!**

Yes, I said it!

He dreamed of you and created you for intimacy with Him...to be one with Him...to know Him

True intimacy: *to know and be known by someone*

Our Maker, the Creator of the universe, specifically dreamed of each of us and made us to be with Him!!

That is truth. But if we look at our react during a crisis or struggle, we wonder if we’re really getting it.

I’m talking about our state of mind...how we see ourselves, how we see God, and how we see our circumstances...how we see this pandemic. How we see our future.

I’m reminded of a story I once heard about Houdini:

In order to build interest in his traveling show, the great escape artist would frequently arrive in a town early and challenge the local jailer to try to keep him locked in a cell. If he couldn't escape within an hour, he would offer the

jailer a \$1,000 reward.

In one town, he made the challenge and was ushered into a jail cell. As soon as the door clanged shut behind him, he began trying to find a way out. As the minutes slipped by, he soon found that this escape was going to be tougher than he had expected. He tried every trick, but he couldn't find a way out. At the end of the time, the jailers found him sitting in the middle of the cell in frustration. He had failed.

The biggest surprise came when the jailer returned and discovered that he had forgotten to lock the door. Houdini could have walked out any time he wanted by just pushing the door open. The irony was that his escape route was one that he had never considered-an unlocked door!

You see, it's not enough for Truth to be right there. We have to know about it and how to use it!

Head knowledge is not enough, it must translate to response on our part

When we really start getting it:

Truth then goes from being *information* to *revelation* to *transformation*.

If it's not making any difference in our lives, then we're really not getting it

And that is the story for this crowd Peter was preaching to. They knew "of" Jesus, it was "information"...but they didn't "know" Him personally...it hadn't become "revelation" that led them to "transformation".

(if time) My story in '98 in my truck on Fowler.

As we will see next week, the crowd, after hearing Peter's sermon were cut to the heart. They asked "what do we need to do?" Peter said "repent for the forgiveness of sins"

Repent/Repentance: What is repentance?

From a dictionary standpoint it means: *feel or express sincere regret or remorse about one's wrongdoing or sin.*

From a Biblical standpoint, it has a *directional implication.*

Meaning, we are going a certain direction in our lives.

We stop...surrender to God, and change direction.

So it's more than saying "I'm sorry" ...it's doing something about it. Changing our direction...making a choice.

And it's not just about the one-time repentance of the "sinner's prayer"

Even seasoned believers need to repent...sometimes frequently.

Repent of what? Attitudes, secret sins, anger, doubts...giving in to fear

Proverbs 28:13

¹³ *Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper,
but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.*

That word renounce is the same idea as repentance.

But notice it says "does not prosper"

When we hide things it's as if we're treading water, not really going forward. Stagnant...

But when we confess them and renounce them...

David, the man God called... understood this:

Psalm 32:3-5

³ *When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away*

through my groaning all day long.
⁴ *For day and night*
your hand was heavy on me;
my strength was sapped
as in the heat of summer.^[b]
⁵ *Then I acknowledged my sin to you*
and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, "I will confess
my transgressions to the LORD."
And you forgave
the guilt of my sin.

Maybe it's time to lighten your load...free your heart...

Next week:

The Fellowship of the Believers

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Footnotes:

- a. Acts 2:4 Or *languages*; also in verse 11
- b. Acts 2:9 That is, the Roman province by that name
- c. Acts 2:21 Joel 2:28-32
- d. Acts 2:23 Or *of those not having the law* (that is, Gentiles)
- e. Acts 2:28 Psalm 16:8-11 (see Septuagint)
- f. Acts 2:35 Psalm 110:1

d. **Being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God:** Peter knew that Jesus' death was in the plan of God. At the same time, those who rejected Him and called for His execution were responsible for the actions of their **lawless hands**.

i. Peter did not flinch at saying, “You crucified this Man who God sent.” His first concern was not to please his audience, but to tell them the truth. The Spirit-filled Peter was a different man than the Peter who a few months before, even knowing Jesus ([Matthew 26:69-75](#)).

e. **It was not possible:** Peter knew that Jesus could not remain bound by death, as explained by the following quotation from [Psalm 16](#). It was not possible that Jesus should remain a victim of the sin and hatred of man; He would certainly triumph over it.

i. **Having loosed the pains of death:** In the phrase **pains of death**, the word **pains** is actually the word for “birth pains.” In this sense, the *tomb* was a *womb* for Jesus.

ii. “It was not possible that the chosen one of God should remain in the grip of death; ‘the abyss can no more hold the Redeemer than a pregnant woman can hold the child in her body.’” (Bruce, quoting Bertram)

4. (25-33) Quoting [Psalm 16](#), Peter explains the resurrected Jesus.

“For David says concerning Him:

**‘I foresaw the LORD always before my face,
For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.
Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad;
Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope.
For You will not leave my soul in Hades,
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.
You have made known to me the ways of life;
You will make me full of joy in Your presence.’**

“Men *and* brethren, let *me* speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised

up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

a. **For David says concerning Him:** Peter recognized that though this Psalm spoke of David, it spoke of someone greater than David – the Messiah, Jesus the Christ. Jesus may have taught Peter this when He instructed the disciples in the Scriptures ([Luke 24:44-45](#)).

b. **Your Holy One:** Jesus bore the full wrath of God on the cross, *as if* He were a guilty sinner, guilty of *all* our sin, even being made sin for us ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)). Yet, that work was an act of holy, giving love for us, so that Jesus Himself did not become a sinner, even though He bore the full *guilt* of our sin.

i. This is the gospel message; that Jesus took our punishment for sin on the cross and remained a perfect Savior through the whole ordeal – *proved* by His resurrection. Apart from the resurrection, we would have no *proof* that Jesus successfully, perfectly, paid for our sins.

c. **Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption:** Because Jesus bore our sin without becoming a sinner, He remained the **Holy One**, even in His death. Since it is incomprehensible that God's Holy One should be bound by death, the resurrection was absolutely inevitable.

i. Instead of being punished for His glorious work on the cross, Jesus was rewarded, as prophetically described in the Psalm: **You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.**

d. **David... is both dead and buried:** Peter points out that this Psalm cannot be speaking of its human author, **David** – he is dead and remains buried. The Psalm must speak prophetically of the Messiah, Jesus.

e. **This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses:** Jesus of Nazareth, the man they all knew (*as you yourselves also know*, [Acts 2:22](#)), was the one who

fulfilled this prophetic Psalm. How did Peter know this? He saw the resurrected Jesus! The basic *evidence* of the resurrection was simply the report of reliable eyewitnesses: **Of which we are all witnesses.**

f. **He poured out this which you now see and hear:** Peter affirms that what the crowd saw was the work of the risen and ascended Jesus, who has sent His Holy Spirit upon His church.

5. (34-36) Quoting [Psalm 110](#), Peter explains the Divine Messiah.

For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself:

**‘The LORD said to my Lord,
“Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”’**

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

a. **The LORD said to my Lord:** This begins the third Old Testament passage Peter used in his sermon, [Psalm 110:1](#). This verse of the Old Testament is quoted in the New Testament more than any other single verse; either quoted or referred to at least 25 times. In this Psalm, David understood and proclaimed the *deity* of the Messiah.

i. In this Psalm, King David – by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – recorded that Yahweh, Israel’s covenant God (**TheLORD**), spoke to David’s Lord (**my Lord**) as God. Peter used this to show that the Messiah, who is the focus of [Psalm 110](#), is in fact Divine – He is God.

b. **Therefore let all the house of Israel know:** The sermon concludes with a summary. Simply, all Israel should know that even though they crucified Jesus, God has declared Him **both Lord and Christ**.

i. It is as if Peter said, “You were all wrong about Jesus. You crucified Him as if He were a criminal, but by the resurrection, God proved that He is Lord and Messiah.”

ii. When Peter exhorted them *whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved* ([Acts 2:21](#)), there is little doubt who the **Lord** is that he spoke of: **Jesus**.

iii. “That the early Christians meant to give Jesus the title *Lord* in this highest sense of all is indicated by their not hesitating on occasion to apply to him passages of Old Testament scripture referring to Yahweh.” (Bruce)

C. The response to Peter’s preaching.

1. (37) They respond with a question: What shall we do?

Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?”

a. **Now when they heard this...“What shall we do?”** This was obviously a significant work of the Holy Spirit. The great crowd listening to Peter was deeply moved by Peter’s bold proclamation of the truth. *They* asked Peter how they should respond.

i. It is wrong to think that Peter offered no kind of invitation or challenge for his listeners to respond. [Acts 2:40](#) says, *And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”* Peter clearly did exhort them to respond, and invited his listeners to “*Be saved.*” Nevertheless, the multitude responded with remarkable initiative.

ii. The response of the crowd also helps us to put the events of that Day of Pentecost into perspective. The exercise of the gift of tongues produced nothing in the listeners except for astonishment and mocking. It wasn’t until the gospel was preached that conviction from the Holy Spirit came. This was the work God really wanted to accomplish.

b. **Cut to the heart:** This is a good way of describing the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They now knew that they were responsible for the death of Jesus (as each of us are), and that they had to *do* something in response to this responsibility.

i. Peter had some previous experience with cutting. When Jesus was arrested, Peter cut off the right ear of one of the men who came to arrest Jesus ([John 18:10](#)). All this was

an embarrassing mess that Jesus had to clean up. That showed Peter in the flesh, doing the best *he* could with a literal sword of human power.

ii. When the resurrected Jesus changed Peter's life and when the power of the Holy Spirit had come upon him, he did some much more effective cutting; cutting hearts, opening them to Jesus. This is what Peter could do in the power of the Spirit, doing God's *best* with the sword of the Spirit, God's Word. Which sword was more powerful?

c. **Men and brethren, what shall we do?** When God is working on someone's heart, they *want* to come to Him; they will act to come to God.

i. It has been said that in normal seasons of Christian work the evangelist seeks the sinner. Yet in times of revival or awakening, things change: the sinner seeks the evangelist. This Day of Pentecost in [Acts 2](#) was one of those great seasons of God's work.

2. (38-40) Peter invites the multitude to come to Jesus.

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation."

a. **Then Peter said to them:** This was in response to the question, "*What shall we do?*" Peter must have been pleasantly amazed to see what God had done in this situation. Instead of people wanting to crucify him because of Jesus, thousands of people wanted to trust in Jesus as Lord and Messiah.

b. **Repent, and let every one of you be baptized:** Responding to the question, "*What shall we do?*" Peter gave them something to *do*. This means that we must *do* something to be saved, we must *do* something to follow Jesus; it doesn't just "happen."

i. Peter *did not* say, "There's nothing you can do. If God saves you, you're saved. If God doesn't save you, you'll never be saved." Though it was true that only God could do the

saving, the people had to receive through repentance and faith, faith leading to action such as baptism.

c. **Repent:** The first thing Peter told them to *do* is **repent**. To repent does not mean to feel sorry, but it means to change one's mind or direction. They had thought a certain way about Jesus before, considering Him worthy of crucifixion. Now they must turn their thinking around, embracing Jesus as Lord and Messiah.

i. **Repent** sounds like such a harsh word in the mouths of many preachers and in the ears of many listeners, but it is an essential aspect of the gospel. **Repent** has been rightly called "the first word of the gospel."

ii. When John the Baptist preached he said, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*" ([Matthew 3:2](#)). When Jesus began to preach He said, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*" ([Matthew 4:17](#)). Now when Peter began to preach, he started with **repent**.

iii. Repentance must never be thought of as something we must do *before* we can come back to God. Repentance describes what coming to God is. You can't turn *towards* God without turning *from* the things He is against.

iv. In this sense, **repent** is a word of great hope. It says, "You don't have to continue the way you've been going, you can turn to God."

v. "The old-fashioned grace of repentance is not to be dispensed with; there must be sorrow for sin; there must be 'a broken and a contrite heart.' This, God will not despise; but a 'conversion' which does not produce this result, God will not accept as genuine." (Spurgeon)

d. **Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ:** This was the second thing Peter said they must do. For them to **be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ** was an expression of their belief and complete trust in Him.

i. Baptism made a clear statement. In that day, Jews were not commonly baptized, only Gentiles who wanted to become Jews. For these Jewish men and women to be baptized showed just how strongly they felt they needed Jesus.

ii. “While baptism with water was the expected symbol for conversion, it was not an indispensable criterion for salvation.” (Longenecker)

e. **The promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off:** As they repented and demonstrated faith and obedience by baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit would be given to them as it was given to the original group of disciples. Peter also specifically promised that the **promise** of the Holy Spirit would be given to those who believe in all succeeding generations (**all who are afar off**).

i. They saw the glorious work of the Holy Spirit among the disciples, and Peter told them that it was something that these people could take part in; they didn’t only have to be observers. And since the promise is for **all who are afar off**, it includes all people up to the present time.

ii. It is also important to note that Peter did not say that the unbelieving, unaware **children** of his listeners should be baptized. He simply said that the promise of **the remission of sins** and the **gift of the Holy Spirit** were for *all* who would repent and believe with active faith, even to coming generations and **all who are afar off, as many as the Lord God will call**.

iii. “That is to say, that great covenant promise, ‘Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved,’ is meant for you, is meant for your children, is meant for Hottentots, is meant for Hindoos, is meant for Greenlanders, is meant for everybody to whom the Lord’s call is addressed.” (Spurgeon)

f. **And with many other words he testified and exhorted them:** Peter’s sermon didn’t end there. He continued to urge the crowd to come to Jesus in repentant surrender.

g. **Be saved from this perverse generation:** Any generation that is responsible for putting Jesus to death is a **perverse generation**. But since *every* generation is responsible for Jesus' death, every generation needs salvation.

3. (41) *The response to Peter's sermon.*

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

a. **About three thousand souls were added to them:** This day of Pentecost saw an amazing harvest of souls. The church went from about 120 people to 3,120 people in one day.

i. Think of how this touched lives beyond that one day. Many of the 3,000 were undoubtedly pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. They expected something special from God, but not anything like this. Many in this crowd went back home, traveling far from Jerusalem, taking the good news of Jesus Christ with them.

b. **Those who gladly received his word were baptized:** Those who believed on Jesus that day did so **gladly**, even making a dramatic statement in baptism. They would not have submitted to baptism unless they were fully convinced of who Jesus was and their great need for Him as a Savior.

i. How could you baptize 3,000 people? There were huge resources of water available on the temple mount, and pools and reservoirs nearby, so it was not difficult to find a place where the baptisms could take place.

ii. God continues to do such great things. After the 1990 Summer Harvest Crusade, there was a mass baptism at Corona del Mar. They couldn't count how many were baptized, but more than 5,000 people attended the event. It was reported as the largest baptism service in American history.

D. The life of these first believers.

1. (42) *The foundation of their Christian life.*

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

a. **And they continued steadfastly:** On the day of Pentecost the sound of the rushing wind, the tongues of fire, and the conversion of 3,000 were all remarkable events. But the things described in [Acts 2:42](#) were the abiding legacy of God's work.

b. **They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine:** They relied on the apostles to communicate to them who Jesus was and what He had done. They just trusted in Jesus; now they wanted to know more.

i. **Continued steadfastly** uses a Greek verb communicating "a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action." (Longenecker) There was to be no departure from the **apostles' doctrine**, because it was the truth of God.

ii. Thankfully, God allows us to sit under the **apostles' doctrine** – the New Testament record. Every pastor should seek to be unoriginal in the sense that we don't have our own doctrine, but the **apostles' doctrine**.

c. **They continued in steadfastly in...fellowship:** The ancient Greek word *koinonia* (translated here as **fellowship**) has the idea of association, communion, fellowship, and participation; it means to *share* in something.

i. The Christian life is meant to be full of **fellowship**, of sharing one with another.

- We share the same Lord Jesus.
- We share the same guide for life.
- We share the same love for God
- We share the same desire to worship Him.

- We share the same struggles.
- We share the same victories
- We share the same job of living for Him.
- We share the same joy of communicating the gospel.

d. **They continued in steadfastly...in the breaking of bread:** Even living so close to the time when Jesus was crucified, they still never wanted to forget what He did on the cross. How much more important is it for us to never forget?

e. **They continued in steadfastly... in prayers.** Whenever God's work is done, God's people gather for prayer and worship.

i. "In the Greek the definite article occurs before the word 'prayer.' The text actually says, 'to the prayers.' They devoted themselves 'to *the* breaking of bread and to *the* prayers.' Obviously, that is a reference to something formal – to worship in which the people got together and praised God." (Boice)

f. **The apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers:** Everything else we read about the power and glory of the early church flows from this foundation of the word, fellowship, remembrance of Jesus' work on the cross, and prayer.

i. From Luke's description of the early Christian community, "The educated reader would have got the impression here that the Greek ideal of society had been realized." (Dictionary of New Testament Theology)

ii. "It is presented as a model church, but this does not mean that it was perfect. A few chapters further on, we are going to find that it was far from perfect." (Boice)

2. (43) *The presence of the power of God.*

Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

a. **Then fear came upon every soul:** This was evidence of the power of God. One of the greatest, most powerful works God can do is to change the human heart towards a reverent honor of the Lord.

b. **Many signs and wonders were done:** This was evidence of the power of God. Where God is at work, lives will be touched in miraculous ways.

3. (44-45) *Their close hearts and sharing in the common life of Jesus.*

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

a. **Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common:** With the influx of more than 3,000 believers, most of whom stayed in Jerusalem and didn't have jobs, the family of Christians *had* to share if they were to survive.

i. We shouldn't regard this as an early experiment in communism because it was *voluntary, temporary, and flawed* to the extent that the church in Jerusalem was in continual need of financial support from other churches. Also, we don't have any evidence this continued very long.

b. **All who believed were together:** The Jews had a tremendous custom of hospitality during any major feast like Pentecost. Visitors were received into private homes, and no one could charge for giving a bed or a room to a visitor or for supplying their basic needs. The Christians took this tremendous feast-time hospitality and made it an everyday thing.

c. **Sold their possessions and their goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need:** The power of God is evident here because Jesus became much more important to them than their possessions.

4. (46-47) *The Christian family lived together and grew.*

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising

God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

a. **So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house:** The church is meant to worship God and learn His Word together. Yet it is meant to do more; God wants us to share our *lives* with one another.

b. **Praising God and having favor with all the people:** Their Christian experience was daily, joyful and simple – good examples for us to follow.

c. **And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved:** This is God's prescription for church growth. If we take care to follow the example of [Acts 2:42-47a](#), God will take care of growing the church Himself.

Acts 2:13

¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Tonight, we will see Peter's response to this statement.

Acts 2:14-21

Peter Addresses the Crowd

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

*¹⁷ "In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.*

*¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,*

and they will prophesy.

¹⁹ *I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.*

²⁰ *The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.*

²¹ *And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'*

OK, so let's begin to unpack this. V14

¹⁴ *Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd*

This is Peter...the same impetuous Peter that had often spoken before thinking...this is the same Peter that had denied Jesus 3 times.

And now we see Peter standing up, raising his voice with conviction, power, and effectiveness. What's the difference? Did he go to a self-help seminar on building self-esteem? Had he joined the Toastmasters to work on his public speaking skills?

The answer is in Acts 1:8

⁸ *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you*

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is about power and really, when you think about it...it is a *supernatural reset!* In other words, we are instantaneously changed and are no longer operating based on our own abilities. Our insecurities are thrown out the window! This is exciting! It is no longer about us, and what we think of ourselves. We are able to do things we never thought we'd do...face things we never thought we could face!

Zechariah 4:6

⁶ *... 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.*

And as I pondered this, I realized...the Spirit coming on us in power enables us to awaken the latent potential in us. The things we doubted about ourselves or didn't even know existed. God knows they are there. And it has nothing to do with what we know or think about ourselves.

Church – this changes everything! *God doesn't rally around our opinion of ourselves!*

And when I think of Peter...I think of the exchange between him and Jesus in John 13 before all this:

John 13:36-38

³⁶ *Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?"*

Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later." ³⁷ Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." ³⁸ Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!

And I can just hear Peter..."*Not me, Lord. No way*".

Then fast forward to the scene as Jesus was arrested and going through the mockery of a trial, on His passion week journey to the cross to die for all mankind...here's Peter...alone, all the disciples had been scattered...it's a cold night...he's standing there warming himself by the fire...fearful...not understanding what is going on...the people ask him if he is one of Jesus' disciples...he denies it. They ask him again...he denies it again...this time his stomach turns and his heart begins to break...a third time he is asked, and this time it is by a relative of the man whose ear he had cut off defending Jesus...his heart is pounding...panic grips him...he is torn....probably nauseous from the war going on inside of him...out of fear he denies Jesus the third time...and then the rooster crows...just as Jesus predicted.

What an absolute and colossal fail! He did the very thing he swore he wouldn't do. This was a fail with a capital F.

How does he live with himself? How can he forgive himself?

I mean, surely Peter had months, if not years, to recover from this and get back on track, right? ...maybe listen to a few motivational tapes...go on a sabbatical trip to find himself...

No, this scene in Acts 2 is literally just a few weeks after Jesus' resurrection (many scholars believe around 40 days)

So what's the explanation?

2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

And if you'll recall, that term "in Christ" in the original Greek means the same as the word "baptize", which is "submerged or immersed in"

John the Baptist said:

Matt 3:11

¹¹ "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

So in other words...with all that being said, these two ideas combined could read:

If anyone is in Christ, completely submerged in Him, immersed in Him...baptized with His Holy Spirit....they are a new person, no longer operating under the old mindsets...no longer bound by their past...no longer defined by their mistakes and failures...they are now filled with the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit, and led by the Spirit!

They are no longer the same in Jesus' name!

Can we all say that? *I am no longer the same in Jesus' name!*

That, my friends, is what took an impetuous wishy-washy Peter and in short order, empowered him to preach a sermon that moved 3,000 people to become believers! ***And by the way...can I point out – he did this without preparation!***

It is all about the Spirit coming on us to change us and empower us!

However, many people come to Christ, and yet still find themselves in the same struggles...the same mind sets...they begin to doubt their salvation...*I thought I was saved...if I am really a Christian, why do I still have these thoughts? Why am I still tempted? Why do I still struggle?*

Show diagram (explain) (spirit is regenerated, and it is the real us)

And when we are filled with and immersed in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit empowers *our spirit...*the *real us...*strengthening us *in our spirit...*reminding us who we are *in our spirit...*and empowering us to do great things, *in our spirit.*

Romans 8:15-16

¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

When we are filled and baptized with the Holy Spirit, we will never ever hear the Spirit tell us to give in to fear...to be paranoid...to live in the past...to beat ourselves up...to look around and wring our hands...and He will surely never tell us to give up!

These messages are from the enemy and our own flesh, and we are no longer obligated to engage with those conversations!

And just before that in Romans 8, Paul says:

¹² Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

I believe Peter understood this concept...he had a task before him that was bigger than he was...to bring the gospel to the unsaved world...he had no time to be dragged back into the guilt of his past, he had no time to ponder the accusations of the enemy and his own accusing heart...he had no time to kick himself, second guess himself, and ponder the shoulda-woulda-coulda's...*he was no longer obligated to that...so he engaged his spirit man, not his flesh...not his carnal mind...he chose to be led by the Spirit of God*

We must do the same...*choose to engage our spirit-man...that is the real, regenerated us...*

Can we all say this *“I am no longer obligated to my past”*

“I am no longer obligated to fear”

“I am no longer obligated to what the enemy says” In Jesus’ name

Let’s get back to the text in Acts 2

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning!

These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning!

Isn’t it funny how we mock what we don’t understand. That still goes on today in criticism of the church...people don’t understand, so they write us off as religious nuts, especially when it comes to spiritual gifts. But Peter hit their criticism head on. In that time and culture, it was unthinkable that people would be drunk at 9:00 in the morning.

According to one commentator: Most Jews at that time did not eat or drink until later, after they had time for prayer.

Let's finish up....vv16-21

¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

*¹⁷ “In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.*

*¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.*

*¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.*

*²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.*

*²¹ And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.’*

This is right out of Joel 2:28-32

What was Peter doing here? In this powerful move of the Holy Spirit, with all the signs and wonders...he in essence said: *What does the Word of God say about this?*

Church: God is consistent...every move of the Holy Spirit will be in accordance with His Word. God never contradicts His own Word.

The Spirit will never tell you something that is in conflict with His Word. *Examples?*

Let's wrap it up with v21

²¹ *And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'*

I want you to notice two operative components: “everyone” and “will be saved”

In the middle of all this God reveals His heart...*to save people!*

He wants you to be saved!

2 Peter 3:9

⁹ *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

1 John 1:9

⁹ *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

Romans 10:9

⁹ *If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

Next week:

²² “Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³ This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men,^[d] put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

²⁵ David said about him:

“I saw the Lord always before me.

Because he is at my right hand,

I will not be shaken.

²⁶ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest in hope,

²⁷ because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,
you will not let your holy one see decay.

²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life;

you will fill me with joy in your presence. ^[e] **Psalm 16:8-11**

²⁹ “Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰ But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹ Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay.

³² God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. ³³ Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. ³⁴ For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

a. “The Lord said to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand

³⁵ until I make your enemies

a footstool for your feet.” ^[f] **Psalm 110:1**

³⁶ “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

The Fellowship of the Believers

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

2. (16-21) Quoting [Joel 2](#), Peter explains the strange events at Pentecost.

a. **But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:** In the midst of this great outpouring of the Holy Spirit, among signs and wonders and speaking in tongues, what did Peter do? Essentially, he said, “Let’s have a Bible study. Let’s look at what **the prophet Joel** wrote.”

i. This introduces the first of three Old Testament passages Peter will quote: [Joel 2:28-32](#), [Psalm 16:8-11](#), and [Psalm 110:1](#).

ii. This focus on God’s Word did not quench the moving of the Holy Spirit; it fulfilled what the Holy Spirit wanted to do. All the signs and wonders and speaking in tongues were preparing for this work of God’s Word.

iii. Unfortunately, some people set the Word against the Spirit. They almost think it's more spiritual if there is no Bible study. Sadly, this is often due to the weak and unspiritual teaching of some who teach the Bible.

b. **The prophet Joel:** This quotation from [Joel 2:28-32](#) focuses on God's promise to pour out His Spirit on all flesh. What happened on the day of Pentecost was a *near* fulfillment of that promise, with the *final* fulfillment coming in the last days (which Peter had good reason to believe he was in).

i. Joel mostly prophesied about judgment that was coming to ancient Israel. Yet in the midst of the many warnings of judgment, God also gave several words of promise – promises of future blessing, like this one that announces an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

c. **It shall come to pass in the last days:** The idea of the **last days** is that they are the times of the Messiah, encompassing both His humble coming and His return in glory. Because Jesus had already come in humility, they were aware that His return in glory could be any time.

i. Though there would be some 2,000 years until Jesus returned, until this point, history had been running *towards* the point of the ultimate establishment of God's kingdom on earth. But from this time on, history runs *parallel* to that point, ready at any time for the consummation.

ii. It may also be helpful to see the **last days** as something like a season – a general period of time – more than a specific *period*, such as a week. In the whole span of God's plan for human history, we are in the season of the **last days**.

iii. "Peter did not say of that pentecostal enduement, 'Now *is fulfilled* that which was spoken by the prophet Joel,' but, more guardedly, '*This is that* which was spoken;' that is to say, Joel's words furnish the *explanation* of this first Pentecost, though this does not finish their *fulfillment*." (Pierson)

d. **I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh:** In using the quotation from Joel, Peter explained what these curious onlookers saw – the Holy Spirit poured forth upon the people. Before the Holy Spirit was given in drops, now He is *poured* forth – and **on all flesh**.

i. This was a glorious emphasis on Pentecost. Under the Old Covenant, certain people were filled with the Spirit at certain times for specific purposes. Now, under the New Covenant, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is for all who call upon the name of the LORD, even **menservants** and **maidservants**.

ii. “There had been no provision for, and no promise of, an abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of any Old Testament saint.” (Hughes). This changes under the New Covenant.

e. **Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved:** Peter also used this passage from Joel to an evangelistic purpose. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit meant that God now offered salvation in a way previously unknown – to **whoever calls on the name of the LORD**, whether they are Jew or Gentile.

i. It would be many years until the gospel was offered to Gentiles, yet Peter’s sermon text announced the gospel invitation by saying, **whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved**.

ii. The idea is expressed in [Proverbs 18:10](#): *The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.*

3. (22-24) Peter introduces the focus of the sermon: The resurrected Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know; Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.”

a. **Men of Israel, hear these words:** Many people would think it would be enough for Peter to stop after the quotation from Joel, considering all we have in it. Joel told us of:

- An outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- Miraculous dreams, visions, and prophecy.
- Signs and wonders regarding the Day of the Lord.
- An invitation to call on the name of the Lord.

i. But it wasn't enough, because Peter had not yet spoken about the saving work of Jesus on our behalf. Everything until this point had been introduction, explaining the strange things they just saw. Now Peter would bring the essential message.

b. **Men of Israel, hear these words:** This was much as Peter had already said, *let this be known to you, and heed my words* ([Acts 2:14](#)). Peter wanted people to pay attention, and he spoke as if he had something important to say – something some teachers fail to do.

c. **As you yourselves also know:** Peter referred to what these people already knew about Jesus. They already knew of His life and miraculous works. Often in speaking to people about Jesus, we should start with what they *already* know about Him.

d. **Being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God:** Peter knew that Jesus' death was in the plan of God. At the same time, those who rejected Him and called for His execution were responsible for the actions of their **lawless hands**.

i. Peter did not flinch at saying, "You crucified this Man who God sent." His first concern was not to please his audience, but to tell them the truth. The Spirit-filled Peter was a different man than the Peter who a few months before, even knowing Jesus ([Matthew 26:69-75](#)).

e. **It was not possible:** Peter knew that Jesus could not remain bound by death, as explained by the following quotation from [Psalm 16](#). It was not possible that Jesus should remain a victim of the sin and hatred of man; He would certainly triumph over it.

i. **Having loosed the pains of death:** In the phrase **pains of death**, the word **pains** is actually the word for “birth pains.” In this sense, the *tomb* was a *womb* for Jesus.

ii. “It was not possible that the chosen one of God should remain in the grip of death; ‘the abyss can no more hold the Redeemer than a pregnant woman can hold the child in her body.’” (Bruce, quoting Bertram)

4. (25-33) Quoting [Psalm 16](#), Peter explains the resurrected Jesus.

“For David says concerning Him:

**‘I foresaw the LORD always before my face,
For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.
Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad;
Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope.
For You will not leave my soul in Hades,
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.
You have made known to me the ways of life;
You will make me full of joy in Your presence.’**

“Men *and* brethren, let *me* speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

a. **For David says concerning Him:** Peter recognized that though this Psalm spoke of David, it spoke of someone greater than David – the Messiah, Jesus the Christ. Jesus may have taught Peter this when He instructed the disciples in the Scriptures ([Luke 24:44-45](#)).

b. **Your Holy One:** Jesus bore the full wrath of God on the cross, *as if* He were a guilty sinner, guilty of *all* our sin, even being made sin for us ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)). Yet, that work was an act of holy, giving love for us, so that Jesus Himself did not become a sinner, even though He bore the full *guilt* of our sin.

i. This is the gospel message; that Jesus took our punishment for sin on the cross and remained a perfect Savior through the whole ordeal – *proved* by His resurrection. Apart from the resurrection, we would have no *proof* that Jesus successfully, perfectly, paid for our sins.

c. **Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption:** Because Jesus bore our sin without becoming a sinner, He remained the **Holy One**, even in His death. Since it is incomprehensible that God's Holy One should be bound by death, the resurrection was absolutely inevitable.

i. Instead of being punished for His glorious work on the cross, Jesus was rewarded, as prophetically described in the Psalm: **You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.**

d. **David... is both dead and buried:** Peter points out that this Psalm cannot be speaking of its human author, **David** – he is dead and remains buried. The Psalm must speak prophetically of the Messiah, Jesus.

e. **This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses:** Jesus of Nazareth, the man they all knew (*as you yourselves also know*, [Acts 2:22](#)), was the one who fulfilled this prophetic Psalm. How did Peter know this? He saw the resurrected Jesus! The basic *evidence* of the resurrection was simply the report of reliable eyewitnesses: **Of which we are all witnesses.**

f. **He poured out this which you now see and hear:** Peter affirms that what the crowd saw was the work of the risen and ascended Jesus, who has sent His Holy Spirit upon His church.

5. (34-36) Quoting [Psalm 110](#), Peter explains the Divine Messiah.

For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself:

**‘The LORD said to my Lord,
“Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”’**

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

a. **The LORD said to my Lord:** This begins the third Old Testament passage Peter used in his sermon, [Psalm 110:1](#). This verse of the Old Testament is quoted in the New Testament more than any other single verse; either quoted or referred to at least 25 times. In this Psalm, David understood and proclaimed the *deity* of the Messiah.

i. In this Psalm, King David – by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – recorded that Yahweh, Israel’s covenant God (**TheLORD**), spoke to David’s Lord (**my Lord**) as God. Peter used this to show that the Messiah, who is the focus of [Psalm 110](#), is in fact Divine – He is God.

b. **Therefore let all the house of Israel know:** The sermon concludes with a summary. Simply, all Israel should know that even though they crucified Jesus, God has declared Him **both Lord and Christ**.

i. It is as if Peter said, “You were all wrong about Jesus. You crucified Him as if He were a criminal, but by the resurrection, God proved that He is Lord and Messiah.”

ii. When Peter exhorted them *whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved* ([Acts 2:21](#)), there is little doubt who the **Lord** is that he spoke of: **Jesus**.

iii. “That the early Christians meant to give Jesus the title *Lord* in this highest sense of all is indicated by their not hesitating on occasion to apply to him passages of Old Testament scripture referring to Yahweh.” (Bruce)

C. The response to Peter’s preaching.

1. (37) *They respond with a question: What shall we do?*

Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?”

a. **Now when they heard this...** “**What shall we do?**” This was obviously a significant work of the Holy Spirit. The great crowd listening to Peter was deeply moved by Peter’s bold proclamation of the truth. *They* asked Peter how they should respond.

i. It is wrong to think that Peter offered no kind of invitation or challenge for his listeners to respond. [Acts 2:40](#) says, *And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”* Peter clearly did exhort them to respond, and invited his listeners to “*Be saved.*” Nevertheless, the multitude responded with remarkable initiative.

ii. The response of the crowd also helps us to put the events of that Day of Pentecost into perspective. The exercise of the gift of tongues produced nothing in the listeners except for astonishment and mocking. It wasn’t until the gospel was preached that conviction from the Holy Spirit came. This was the work God really wanted to accomplish.

b. **Cut to the heart:** This is a good way of describing the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They now knew that they were responsible for the death of Jesus (as each of us are), and that they had to *do* something in response to this responsibility.

i. Peter had some previous experience with cutting. When Jesus was arrested, Peter cut off the right ear of one of the men who came to arrest Jesus ([John 18:10](#)). All this was an embarrassing mess that Jesus had to clean up. That showed Peter in the flesh, doing the best *he* could with a literal sword of human power.

ii. When the resurrected Jesus changed Peter's life and when the power of the Holy Spirit had come upon him, he did some much more effective cutting; cutting hearts, opening them to Jesus. This is what Peter could do in the power of the Spirit, doing God's *best* with the sword of the Spirit, God's Word. Which sword was more powerful?

c. **Men and brethren, what shall we do?** When God is working on someone's heart, they *want* to come to Him; they will act to come to God.

i. It has been said that in normal seasons of Christian work the evangelist seeks the sinner. Yet in times of revival or awakening, things change: the sinner seeks the evangelist. This Day of Pentecost in [Acts 2](#) was one of those great seasons of God's work.

2. (38-40) Peter invites the multitude to come to Jesus.

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation."

a. **Then Peter said to them:** This was in response to the question, "*What shall we do?*" Peter must have been pleasantly amazed to see what God had done in this situation. Instead of people wanting to crucify him because of Jesus, thousands of people wanted to trust in Jesus as Lord and Messiah.

b. **Repent, and let every one of you be baptized:** Responding to the question, "*What shall we do?*" Peter gave them something to *do*. This means that we must *do* something to be saved, we must *do* something to follow Jesus; it doesn't just "happen."

i. Peter *did not* say, "There's nothing you can do. If God saves you, you're saved. If God doesn't save you, you'll never be saved." Though it was true that only God could do the saving, the people had to receive through repentance and faith, faith leading to action such as baptism.

c. **Repent:** The first thing Peter told them to *do* is **repent**. To repent does not mean to feel sorry, but it means to change one's mind or direction. They had thought a certain way about Jesus before, considering Him worthy of crucifixion. Now they must turn their thinking around, embracing Jesus as Lord and Messiah.

i. **Repent** sounds like such a harsh word in the mouths of many preachers and in the ears of many listeners, but it is an essential aspect of the gospel. **Repent** has been rightly called "the first word of the gospel."

ii. When John the Baptist preached he said, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*" ([Matthew 3:2](#)). When Jesus began to preach He said, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*" ([Matthew 4:17](#)). Now when Peter began to preach, he started with **repent**.

iii. Repentance must never be thought of as something we must do *before* we can come back to God. Repentance describes what coming to God is. You can't turn *towards* God without turning *from* the things He is against.

iv. In this sense, **repent** is a word of great hope. It says, "You don't have to continue the way you've been going, you can turn to God."

v. "The old-fashioned grace of repentance is not to be dispensed with; there must be sorrow for sin; there must be 'a broken and a contrite heart.' This, God will not despise; but a 'conversion' which does not produce this result, God will not accept as genuine." (Spurgeon)

d. **Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ:** This was the second thing Peter said they must do. For them to **be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ** was an expression of their belief and complete trust in Him.

i. Baptism made a clear statement. In that day, Jews were not commonly baptized, only Gentiles who wanted to become Jews. For these Jewish men and women to be baptized showed just how strongly they felt they needed Jesus.

ii. “While baptism with water was the expected symbol for conversion, it was not an indispensable criterion for salvation.” (Longenecker)

e. The promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off: As they repented and demonstrated faith and obedience by baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit would be given to them as it was given to the original group of disciples. Peter also specifically promised that the **promise** of the Holy Spirit would be given to those who believe in all succeeding generations (**all who are afar off**).

i. They saw the glorious work of the Holy Spirit among the disciples, and Peter told them that it was something that these people could take part in; they didn’t only have to be observers. And since the promise is for **all who are afar off**, it includes all people up to the present time.

ii. It is also important to note that Peter did not say that the unbelieving, unaware **children** of his listeners should be baptized. He simply said that the promise of **the remission of sins** and the **gift of the Holy Spirit** were for *all* who would repent and believe with active faith, even to coming generations and **all who are afar off, as many as the Lord God will call**.

iii. “That is to say, that great covenant promise, ‘Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved,’ is meant for you, is meant for your children, is meant for Hottentots, is meant for Hindoos, is meant for Greenlanders, is meant for everybody to whom the Lord’s call is addressed.” (Spurgeon)

f. And with many other words he testified and exhorted them: Peter’s sermon didn’t end there. He continued to urge the crowd to come to Jesus in repentant surrender.

g. Be saved from this perverse generation: Any generation that is responsible for putting Jesus to death is a **perverse generation**. But since *every* generation is responsible for Jesus’ death, every generation needs salvation.

3. (41) *The response to Peter's sermon.*

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

a. **About three thousand souls were added to them:** This day of Pentecost saw an amazing harvest of souls. The church went from about 120 people to 3,120 people in one day.

i. Think of how this touched lives beyond that one day. Many of the 3,000 were undoubtedly pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. They expected something special from God, but not anything like this. Many in this crowd went back home, traveling far from Jerusalem, taking the good news of Jesus Christ with them.

b. **Those who gladly received his word were baptized:** Those who believed on Jesus that day did so **gladly**, even making a dramatic statement in baptism. They would not have submitted to baptism unless they were fully convinced of who Jesus was and their great need for Him as a Savior.

i. How could you baptize 3,000 people? There were huge resources of water available on the temple mount, and pools and reservoirs nearby, so it was not difficult to find a place where the baptisms could take place.

ii. God continues to do such great things. After the 1990 Summer Harvest Crusade, there was a mass baptism at Corona del Mar. They couldn't count how many were baptized, but more than 5,000 people attended the event. It was reported as the largest baptism service in American history.

D. The life of these first believers.

1. (42) *The foundation of their Christian life.*

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

a. **And they continued steadfastly:** On the day of Pentecost the sound of the rushing wind, the tongues of fire, and the conversion of 3,000 were all remarkable events. But the things described in [Acts 2:42](#) were the abiding legacy of God's work.

b. **They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine:** They relied on the apostles to communicate to them who Jesus was and what He had done. They just trusted in Jesus; now they wanted to know more.

i. **Continued steadfastly** uses a Greek verb communicating "a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action." (Longenecker) There was to be no departure from the **apostles' doctrine**, because it was the truth of God.

ii. Thankfully, God allows us to sit under the **apostles' doctrine** – the New Testament record. Every pastor should seek to be unoriginal in the sense that we don't have our own doctrine, but the **apostles' doctrine**.

c. **They continued in steadfastly in...fellowship:** The ancient Greek word *koinonia* (translated here as **fellowship**) has the idea of association, communion, fellowship, and participation; it means to *share* in something.

i. The Christian life is meant to be full of **fellowship**, of sharing one with another.

- We share the same Lord Jesus.
- We share the same guide for life.
- We share the same love for God
- We share the same desire to worship Him.
- We share the same struggles.
- We share the same victories
- We share the same job of living for Him.

· We share the same joy of communicating the gospel.

d. **They continued in steadfastly...in the breaking of bread:** Even living so close to the time when Jesus was crucified, they still never wanted to forget what He did on the cross. How much more important is it for us to never forget?

e. **They continued in steadfastly... in prayers.** Whenever God's work is done, God's people gather for prayer and worship.

i. "In the Greek the definite article occurs before the word 'prayer.' The text actually says, 'to the prayers.' They devoted themselves 'to *the* breaking of bread and to *the* prayers.' Obviously, that is a reference to something formal – to worship in which the people got together and praised God." (Boice)

f. **The apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers:** Everything else we read about the power and glory of the early church flows from this foundation of the word, fellowship, remembrance of Jesus' work on the cross, and prayer.

i. From Luke's description of the early Christian community, "The educated reader would have got the impression here that the Greek ideal of society had been realized." (Dictionary of New Testament Theology)

ii. "It is presented as a model church, but this does not mean that it was perfect. A few chapters further on, we are going to find that it was far from perfect." (Boice)

2. (43) *The presence of the power of God.*

Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

a. **Then fear came upon every soul:** This was evidence of the power of God. One of the greatest, most powerful works God can do is to change the human heart towards a reverent honor of the Lord.

b. **Many signs and wonders were done:** This was evidence of the power of God. Where God is at work, lives will be touched in miraculous ways.

3. (44-45) *Their close hearts and sharing in the common life of Jesus.*

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

a. **Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common:** With the influx of more than 3,000 believers, most of whom stayed in Jerusalem and didn't have jobs, the family of Christians *had* to share if they were to survive.

i. We shouldn't regard this as an early experiment in communism because it was *voluntary, temporary, and flawed* to the extent that the church in Jerusalem was in continual need of financial support from other churches. Also, we don't have any evidence this continued very long.

b. **All who believed were together:** The Jews had a tremendous custom of hospitality during any major feast like Pentecost. Visitors were received into private homes, and no one could charge for giving a bed or a room to a visitor or for supplying their basic needs. The Christians took this tremendous feast-time hospitality and made it an everyday thing.

c. **Sold their possessions and their goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need:** The power of God is evident here because Jesus became much more important to them than their possessions.

4. (46-47) *The Christian family lived together and grew.*

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

- a. **So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house:** The church is meant to worship God and learn His Word together. Yet it is meant to do more; God wants us to share our *lives* with one another.
- b. **Praising God and having favor with all the people:** Their Christian experience was daily, joyful and simple – good examples for us to follow.
- c. **And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved:** This is God's prescription for church growth. If we take care to follow the example of [Acts 2:42-47a](#), God will take care of growing the church Himself.

In the last couple weeks we have unpacked vv1-3.

We saw some amazing phenomenon. A mighty, rushing wind...tongues of fire separating and resting on each of them. The Holy Spirit was indeed coming in power and making His presence known.

Now in v4 we see a whole new phenomenon.

⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

What's going on here? Well, first of all...note that it wasn't just a *free for all*. V4 says *as the Spirit enabled them*.

Jesus said *you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.*

That is exactly what was happening here.

The Holy Spirit was coming on them in power to do what they could not have done on their own. That is what it is all about. Again, I say the baptism of the Holy Spirit is about power...power to do what was impossible in human terms.

Why do we need power to do what we could not do on our own?

Does God intend for us to be superheroes?

It is because as Spirit-filled Christians, God will give us God-sized tasks to do...He will stretch us...He will give us spiritual gifts to use for the kingdom...we will do things we never dreamed we'd do...we will become the person we were always meant to be...and we will be enabled to face things and be victorious over them...things that would've defeated us in the past. Hard things...such as what we're going through right now. In difficult times like this crisis facing our world, I sure am glad I don't have to face it in my mere humanity. It would eat my lunch!

Power to do what we could not have done on our own.

And in Acts 2, here in the upper room, we see this power come on not just the 12 apostles, but all 120 who were in that room. That power was evidenced by the speaking in other tongues that they did not understand.

I don't know about you, but I don't have the ability to just start speaking another language. But v4 says:

·⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

This scene was repeated several other times in the Book of Acts... *Filled with the Spirit and they began speaking in tongues.* We'll get to those later in our study.

But this scene here in Acts 2 is the fulfilment of what Jesus had spoken about. And it is chock full of intentionality.

Remember, this was happening during the Feast of Pentecost, one of the largest Jewish celebrations, with people from all over

the known world...different cultures...different languages...
converging on this one place.

This was yet another powerful and glorious demonstration of the Holy Spirit coming with power. This being the first time anything like this had happened, it was done deliberately so that others would not just write this off as a bunch of people in a big room speaking gibberish.

The people outside could hear those in the room through the windows...and those in the room were doing something supernatural they could have done on their own...speaking in languages they didn't know. The people outside did understand, and added supernatural validity to the scene, saying:

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?"

One thing we need to understand, Galileans did not have the reputation for being the most advanced and learned culture around. They were looked down upon by other cultures. So it was even more astonishing that these unschooled Galileans were as v11 puts it

declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!

This is an amazing scene. The crowd was *utterly amazed*. Some used it as a time to ask a serious question "*What does this mean?*" But others used it as a time to discount the move of the Spirit as man-made and said "*They have had too much wine.*"

Another aspect of this that makes it amazing is that this new, utterly amazing thing was happening...the Holy Spirit coming in power and

demonstration of the supernatural, yet they were all unified in that room.

I like this take that one author had on this scene:

“Ever since the early church fathers, commentators have seen the blessing of Pentecost as a deliberate and dramatic reversal of the curse of Babel.” (Stott)

So let’s talk about the spiritual gift of tongues. The original Greek term used in this scene in Acts 2 is *heterais glossais*, and it is the same term used in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 when Paul wrote the Corinthian church concerning spiritual gifts:

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

And the term used for *as the Spirit enabled them, as the Spirit gave the utterance, indicates spiritual prompting, or ecstatic prompting. So this wasn’t just simply about translating it to other languages*

This is a gift from the Holy Spirit, just as He determines.

So what is the gift of tongues used for? Obviously, the Holy Spirit would not distribute a gift that had no use.

First of all: *It is a gift of communication between the believer and God*

1 Corinthians 14:2

² For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit.

And in 14&15

¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵ So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding.

The gift of tongues is an important part of the believer's personal devotional life. It is a beautiful and fulfilling experience. And again...remember it's about power... *you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.* Power to do what we could have done on our own. It is about getting out of the natural realm and into the supernatural.

It has been said: The gift of tongues is a personal language of prayer given by God, whereby the believer communicates with God beyond the limits of knowledge and understanding

Secondly, it is a gift for the corporate edification of the congregation.

1 Corinthians 14:5

⁵ I wish you could all speak in tongues, but even more I wish you could all prophesy. For prophecy is greater than speaking in tongues, unless someone interprets what you are saying so that the whole church will be strengthened.

And in vv12-13

¹² So it is with you. Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.

¹³ For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say.

Chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians was written to give instruction on orderly worship. The Corinthian church had gotten off track on several things, and Paul was correcting them on orderly, effective corporate worship.

1 Corinthians 14:26-28

Good Order in Worship

²⁶ What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. ²⁸ If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.

What Paul is saying is that tongues with interpretation is an important part of corporate worship. However, it needs to be done in a way that is beneficial for building up of the church, not adding confusion.

Our text tonight in Acts 2 ends at v13

¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

We’ll pick up the story next week at v14 where Peter, full of the Spirit, stands up and gives one of the most powerful and compelling sermons of all time leading to 3000 people being saved.

We read of the sound of a rushing mighty wind, filling the whole house, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We discussed the fact that in both the Hebrew and Greek languages, the word for *spirit* is the same word for *breath* or wind.

And we learned a new aspect of the Holy Spirit:

The Holy Spirit is the *breath of God*

One of the Hebrew names of God is Ruach Elohim, which means *Spirit of God*

The Hebrew word interpreted as *spirit* is *ruach*, meaning "air in motion." It is the same word we get "breath" from. It can also mean "life."

So if we just look at the word "spirit," and think of it in terms of ghosts, or some transcendental being, or a "feeling" we will miss the full attributes of what the Bible is trying to describe...which is the point that there's a breath involved, the very breath of God....and that there's life involved.

And here, in our scene in Acts 2, the sound heard was the sound of the Holy Spirit being poured out on the disciples.

Tonight, we see further description in v3

3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

First of all, I want to point out that this was a fulfillment of what John the Baptist prophesied earlier in Matthew 3

Matthew 3:11

11 "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

And as we recall, that word "baptize" means, completely immerse or submerge

This verse in the Orthodox Jewish Bible says:

He will give you a tevilah (immersion) with the Ruach Hakodesh and eish (fire).

In other words, this as a special breathing of the Spirit of God that conveys God's presence, power, and fire. This outpouring is directional - *from* heaven *to* earth...from the throne on God and into our world.

And if we look carefully at John the Baptist's wording, we see intentionality,

He says: *He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*

Linguistically, this is called a *hendiadys*

Hendiadys is a figure of speech in which two words joined by the word “and” to give more of an impact.

Websters Dictionary: *William Shakespeare often used hendiadys. For example, his character Macbeth, speaking of the passage of life, says "It is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing." For Shakespeare, "sound and fury" was more effective than "furious sound."*

All this to say: this statement by John the Baptist wasn't saying there would be two baptisms: one of the Holy Spirit, and one of fire...it is translated as *“He will baptize you in the raging fire of the Holy Spirit!*

OK...why fire?

To begin to answer that, let's go back to

Deut 4:24

²⁴ For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

We have already determined that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was about power – power to do what we could not have done on our own. And these apostles were about to embark on the greatest missionary trip of all time, spreading the gospel to Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. They needed power from on high. But now baptism of fire is being introduced. Again, why?

In the Bible, fire is often associated with purification. Malachi refers to the refiner's fire used to purify gold and silver. The refiner uses fire to purify the gold or silver by burning away what is impure...letting the dross, which are the impurities in the metal, the worthless things...the things keeping that metal from being pure, effective, and useful, this dross rises to the surface and is scooped up and thrown away by the refiner, leaving only the valuable things that will last. This is exactly what the Holy Spirit was doing in these apostles...coming on them with power from on high, coming in fire to burn

up all the distractions...the impurities holding them back...so they could do the God-sized task in front of them!

i.e. *****He wanted their whole heart, not just part of it!***

God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

Question: *Is it the same for us?*

Does God want all of our hearts? Will He allow fires to burn in our lives? *Is there a fire burning now?* God will use these crises, these unexpected trials in our lives to burn up the dross in our lives...the attitudes, the habits...the selfishness...these are keeping us impure and holding us back from the God-sized task He put before us.

He wants all of us! Can we say that: *God wants all of me!*

In our Tuesday prayer...nothing God called our church to has changed.

Perhaps, like Jesus told the apostles to stay in Jerusalem, God is saying to us: stay here (*here* being this quarantine time...where He has His church's attention)...stay here until you receive power from on high...stay here until I have done the purification work in you that I want to do...stay here until I have all of you...when this work is done, I will say "go"

1 Peter 1:3-7

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of

trials. ⁷ *These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

I preached this last Sunday on v3, *living hope*. Now we see the rest of the passage.

Church: I want to say again...none of this world crisis took God by surprise...He is not the author of it, but He is doing something in it...He wants to use this trial to draw you back to Him...to grow you in grace... purify your heart and mind...to purify your faith and make it genuine... *of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire*...so that what? So that when Jesus Christ returns (which could be any moment) it *may result in praise, glory and honor*.

Guys, it would be so easy to see this as just an awful interruption to our lives and sit around waiting for life to resume. Hear me...life is now! Life doesn't begin when this is over. God never relinquished His throne...He is still God and we are still His children with all His promises. I am convinced of this...God will move us on when we are ready. (2 Chron 7:14)

One last thing to point out in Acts 2:3. Notice it says *They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.*

tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

So? In the Old Covenant, God's Spirit would move on the nation of Israel as a whole. Now, in the New Covenant, it was resting on each individual equally.

The curtain was torn from top to bottom. This is for you.

an excellent illustration of the principle that the filling of the Holy Spirit is not just for abstract power, but for *purity*.

iv. Under the Old Covenant, the Holy Spirit rested on God's people more as a *nation*, that is, Israel. But under the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit rests upon God's people as *individuals* – the tongues of fire **sat upon each of them**. This strange phenomenon had never happened before and would never happen again in the pages of the Bible, but was given to emphasize this point, that the Spirit of God was present with and in and upon *each individual*.

Let's begin by unpacking v1. *When the day of Pentecost came*

When we did the Ezra/Nehemiah study, we learned about the different festivals and celebrations the Jews had. Pentecost was a feast they had 50 days after Passover. It was a celebration of the first fruits of the harvest. It was also called *The Day of the First Fruits*.

Leviticus 23:15-22

¹⁵ “*From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks.* ¹⁶ *Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD.* ¹⁷ *From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of two-tenths of an ephah of the finest flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of firstfruits to the LORD.* ¹⁸ *Present with this bread seven male lambs, each a year old and without defect, one young bull and two rams. They will be a burnt offering to the LORD, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings—a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.*

¹⁹ *Then sacrifice one male goat for a sin offering^[a] and two lambs, each a year old, for a fellowship offering.* ²⁰ *The priest is to wave the two lambs before the LORD as a wave offering, together with the bread of the firstfruits. They are a sacred offering to the LORD for the priest.* ²¹ *On that same day you are to proclaim a sacred assembly and do no regular work. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.*

²² “*When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you. I am the LORD your God.’”*

Pentecost also marked the day Moses delivered the Law to the people. So it's fitting that the first Pentecost marked the day they received God's law, to *direct* them. On this Day of Pentecost, they received God's Spirit, to *empower* them.

And remember, Jesus had told them multiple times that He was going to send the Holy Spirit. Let's look at the account in John:

John 14:15-17

Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit

¹⁵ "If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be^[e] in you.

Back to the text. Now notice the 2nd part of v1:

they were all together in one place.

Notice that...*they were all together in one place.* I don't think this is just talking about them staying put.

First of all, it shows obedience.

Acts 1:4

4 ... "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about."

They clearly obeyed Jesus' command to wait for the promised Holy Spirit.
Think about this...Jesus didn't say how long to wait.

So I ask the question: *What would have happened if they didn't wait?*

Another thing this tells me: *They were in one heart and mind*

They were all together, sharing the same heart, the same reverence for God, the same hope in His promise.

What can God do with a church in unity?

Here are just a couple scriptures on that:

1 Corinthians 1:10

¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers and sisters,^[a] in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

John 17:20-21

²⁰ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Back to the text. V2

² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

Remember, intentionality...

Why a sound like a wind? And in this case, a strong wind?

Here, we read of the sound of a rushing mighty wind, filling the whole house, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This makes sense considering the fact that in both the Hebrew and Greek languages, the word for *spirit* is the same word for *breath* or wind.

It goes back to the beginning:

Genesis 2:4-7

⁴ *This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.*

⁵ *Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, ⁶ but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. ⁷ Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*

Look v7 in King James Version:

Genesis 2:7 (KJV)

⁷ *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*

Notice "a living soul."

So, along with what we have learned about the Holy Spirit:

The Holy Spirit is a person – the 3rd person of the trinity

Gods power and presence dwell in us in the person of the Holy Spirit

Now, we're learning a new aspect of the Holy Spirit:

The Holy Spirit is the *breath of God*

One of the Hebrew names of God is Ruach Elohim, which means *Spirit of God*

The Hebrew word interpreted as *spirit* is *ruach*, meaning "air in motion." It is the same word we get "breath" from. It can also mean "life."

So if we just look at the word "spirit," and think of it in terms of ghosts, or some transcendental being, or a "feeling" we will miss the full attributes of what the Bible is trying to describe...which is the point that there's a breath involved, the very breath of God...and that there's life involved.

And here, in our scene in Acts 2, the sound heard was the sound of the Holy Spirit being poured out on the disciples.

When you look at the characteristics of wind, it makes sense:

Wind can't be contained or manipulated, it blows things away (by the way, when it blows things away, I don't believe we are supposed to go find them)

But also...check this out:

When the Spirit breathes, *dead things come to life*

Again going back to the creation story...we see the Spirit brooding over the newly created earth

“Brooding” indicates the act of “thinking deeply with dissatisfaction, or even sadness”

God knew the earth was incomplete, that it had not reached its potential....He saw it in its chaotic mess and knew that He had so much greater in mind for it

And so He moved and spoke life into it!

And in the same way....the Holy Spirit broods today over us.... He sees our chaotic mess...He sees us giving in to fear....He sees us stuck in our struggle, seeing life through our brokenness....He sees us giving up....He sees us dry and parched, in a barren desert.....and His desire is to breathe life into us again!

Ezekiel 37:1-10

The Valley of Dry Bones

37 The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ² He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. ³ He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

I said, “Sovereign LORD, you alone know.”

⁴ Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! ⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath^[a] enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶ I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’”

⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸ I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

⁹ Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

Footnotes:

- a. Ezekiel 37:5 The Hebrew for this word can also mean *wind* or *spirit*

**Whatever is dry and parched – The Spirit wants to breathe life into
Whatever dream and passion that has died -**

Lost hope?.....

Chaotic home? Chaotic marriage?.....

Cold and harden heart?.....

Lukewarm relationship with God?....

Meaningless existence?....

He wants to breathe life into this church and send revival!

Church: This is what I believe (show pic)

When the Spirit breathes, there is *no doubt* (v6)

There’s no “wow, what was that?” “Boy, what a coincidence”

My experience with the Crossover logo

A few last observations of the wind in Acts 2:2

Suddenly: Sometimes God moves suddenly.

Sound: It was real, though it could not be touched; it came by the ears.

From heaven: This wasn't of earth; not created or manipulated or made here.

Mighty: Full of force, coming with great power.

Genesis 11:1-9

The Tower of Babel

¹ Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ² As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

³ They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

⁵ But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building.

⁶ The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

⁸ So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹ That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

Footnotes:

- a. [Genesis 11:2](#) Or from the east; or in the east

- b. [Genesis 11:2](#) That is, Babylonia
- c. [Genesis 11:9](#) That is, Babylon; *Babel* sounds like the Hebrew for *confused*.

What does that mean? Well, the word witness means *attesting of a fact or event; testimony*

Did you know that when you give your testimony, you are being God's witness? You are attesting of the grace that God has shown you and of His love for mankind.

Isaiah 43:12

¹² I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—

I, and not some foreign god among you.

You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “that I am God.

God's original intent was for His people to be His witnesses among the pagans)

Next, look at the second half of the verse Acts 1:8:

and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

These are the last words Jesus spoke on earth. He wanted to make them count. Look at the intentionality...ever-widening circle of influence.

First: Jerusalem. OK, we can buy that...Jerusalem is where they and the Christians were at the time. That's a no-brainer, right? But on the other hand...wait a minute Jesus...Jerusalem is the place you were crucified! Are you sure about that?

Then notice...*to all Judea.*

OK, this is getting kind of ambitious here, Jesus. *All of Judea?* That's a large area. And besides, Judea as a whole rejected your ministry, Jesus.

Not, look at what's next...Samaria. Samaria?! That's a defiled and hated bunch of half-breeds

And then Jesus says: *and to the ends of the earth*

You have to understand...the Gentiles weren't well thought of by the Jews. They were seen as unclean. The relationship between Jew and Gentiles was marked by suspicion and hate.

Reminds me of Jonah and Nineva.

And yet here, in the last words of Jesus here on earth, He gives them the commission to bring the gospel to these very people.

What does this reveal about the Father?

His love for all. His patience for all, His desire for all to be saved.

John 3:16

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

2 Peter 3:9

9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

His mission field is different than ours, and His harvest will be different than ours.

One last thing about this idea of *Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

- *Acts chapters 1-7 we will see the gospel presented in Jerusalem.*
- *Acts 8-12 we will see the gospel presented in Judea and Samaria.*
- *Acts 13-28 we will see it going to the end of the earth.*

God desired to save a lost world. He wanted a witness sent to all of these places, and the Holy Spirit would empower them to do this work.

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

The Aramaic is “A cloud accepted him and covered him from their eyes.” He did not stand on a cloud and ascend to some outer place. He started from their presence, and disappeared from view in a cloud, ascending into heaven. This is significant, because...remember, intentionality...when he returns it will be a reverse order. We will see him appearing from out of a cloud and descending back into our visible presence where we can see him and be with him.

Revelation 1:7

⁷ “Look, he is coming with the clouds,”^[a]

and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”;

*and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.”^[b]
So shall it be! Amen.*

Matthew 26:64

⁶⁴ “You have said so,” Jesus replied. “But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

This statement enraged the high priest...who said “this man must be put to death”

So all this that was happening was exactly as Jesus told them.

And remember, Jesus said it was to their advantage that He left.

John 16:7-10

7 But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 about sin, because people do not

believe in me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer

Let's move on...vv10 and 11

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

In this scene we see God graciously sending an angel to remind them to get their minds out of the natural, seen world, and into the supernatural...the world of obedience to a call bigger than they were. They needed to get busy doing what Jesus commanded them to do, which was go back to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. They were about to participate in a monumental move of God in the spreading of the gospel, and they absolutely needed to focus, and not veer off of God's plan...not get ahead...and not get behind.

Jesus had just told them He was going to leave them, and He told them to go to the outer Gentile regions and they were there, staring into the clouds wondering where Jesus went.

But we can't help ourselves at times, right? We are human. We live and breathe in the natural. It is so hard not to be distracted by what we see.

What are some ways we do this?

We aren't alone. Let's go back and read about the scene just after Jesus' resurrection.

Luke 24:1-8

Jesus Has Risen

¹ On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes

that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ”⁸ Then they remembered his words.

One last thing before we move on from vv10-11:

*Notice in v11 the angel says **This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven. This same Jesus. Remember, intentionality... This same Jesus***

What a statement. In other words...don't worry, when He returns He won't be some other high and mighty, far off, disinterested, maybe even angry Jesus. It will be *this same Jesus* who returns...the Jesus that walked beside you, ate with you, prayed with you...the same Jesus who taught you, the same Jesus who knew you, the same Jesus who loved you. What a promise!

Moving on...

Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas

¹² *Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk^[c] from the city. **A little over a half mile...which was the limit given in Rabbinic law on the distance a Jew could walk from the city.***

¹³ *When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. **(The place of the last supper)** Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ They all joined together constantly in prayer, **(orig “in one soul”)** along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. **Did you know Jesus had brothers? James is the one most mentioned. There is even debate about the meaning of a few scriptures that insinuate Jesus had sisters. But let's quickly at a couple references to His brothers:***

Matthew 13:55

55 “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?”

John 2:12

¹² After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

And in Acts 1:14 that we just read, we see that His brothers were part of that group that *joined together constantly in prayer*, or “in one soul”. But was it always that way?

John 7:5

⁵ For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

Mark 3:20-21

²⁰ Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹ When his family^[a] heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.”

It appears that His brothers didn’t believe Him until after the resurrection.

Ever notice...sometimes the ones that love us are the most critical at times? Jesus was clearly no exception.

*¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) ¹⁶ and said, “Brothers and sisters,^[d] the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. **Notice... in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David***

Turn to 2 Timothy 3:16

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness

One scholar said:

The principal author of the Bible is God, who inspired human writers by directing their minds, wills, memories and mental faculties. Because they were inspired by God, they wrote only what God wanted them to write and no more.

¹⁷ He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.”

¹⁸ (With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. **(Matthew 27:25 says he hanged himself)** ¹⁹ Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

²⁰ “For,” said Peter, “it is written in the Book of Psalms:

“May his place be deserted;

let there be no one to dwell in it, ^[e] **(Psalm 69:25)**
and,

“May another take his place of leadership. ^[f] **(Psalm 109:8)**

²¹ Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, **He needed to be proven...part of them...one of them** ²² beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

²³ So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” ²⁶ Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

Casting lots was similar to rolling dice. However, it was a little more spiritual than that. Remember, the Holy Spirit had not arrived yet. The idea was that they would pray about whatever decision it was and then cast the lots with the belief that God would guide the outcome. Similar to the Urim and Thummim used by the priest in the Old Testament.

Proverbs 16:33

³³ *The lot is cast into the lap,
but its every decision is from the LORD.*

One last thing before we go into chapter 2. The Book of Acts is also called the Acts of the Apostles.

But look at Luke 6:12-13

Luke 6:12-13

The Twelve Apostles

¹² One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. ¹³ When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles:

Acts 1:1-2

1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

Jesus originally started with disciples...but then there is reference to apostles. Which one is it? And just what is the difference between a disciple and an apostle?

A disciple is a student, one who learns from a teacher

An apostle is a messenger, one who is sent by the Lord

So, were these men disciples, or apostles? Both

Are we disciples, or apostles? Both

Part 6: Tonight's study could be titled: *What if they didn't stay in Jerusalem?*

And let's pick up the story in Acts 1 where Jesus said these powerful words:

Acts 1:8.

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

So what did Jesus mean by "when the Holy Spirit comes on you"?

Well, we established that as believers, the Holy Spirit is in us:

1 Corinthians 6:19

¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own

When we became believers, the Holy Spirit moved in and took up residence. Basically.....it's no longer about us!

He is with us and in us, everywhere we go and in each circumstance. No matter what we face, the Holy Spirit is there with us. We are not alone.

And by the way...is it a one-time thing?

Ephesians 5:18

¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

The Greek word is *plerousthe*
Present imperative verb meaning "*constantly being filled, or keep being filled*"

Similar to the idea of the sail of a sailboat (show pic):

Sail must be continuously filled with wind to drive the boat

We can say "*Lord, fill my sails today*"

So that's the "in us"...in us as believers...being filled with the Spirit, continually filled with the Spirit...driven by the Spirit

But here in Acts 1, Jesus doesn't say the HS will be in us...He says He will *come on us*.

Can I just say as your pastor....I believe God wants to pour out His Spirit on us like we have never seen before.

Ezek 39:29

²⁹ I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the people of Israel, declares the Sovereign LORD."

Joel 2:28

*²⁸ "And afterward,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.*

So again, what did Jesus mean by "*when the Holy Spirit comes on you*"?

Let's set the stage and look at the events leading up to this:

After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples

Luke 24:49-53

⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

The Ascension of Jesus

⁵⁰ When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

So here we see the disciples gathered together, still mourning Jesus' death, but most likely confused because there were reports that Jesus had already appeared to some. Then the resurrected Christ Himself appears to them and their sorrow turns to joy...their confusion to praise. *But according to Jesus, there was yet another wonderful event still to happen.*

Look at the same scene in book of Acts 1:4-5:

Acts 1:4-5

⁴ *On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."*

Here, Jesus refers to a *baptism*

So, up to this point, we have heard Jesus:

- Say "*when the Holy Spirit comes on you*"
- Refer to "*what the Father has promised*"
- Refer to a "*baptism in the Holy Spirit*"

To help us understand this, let's look at the definition of the word *baptize*:

To completely immerse (as in water)

Jesus was instructing them to receive the Holy Spirit *upon them*.

In other words, completely submerged, completely immersed in the Holy Spirit.

Similar to what Paul meant in 2 Cor 5:17

2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷ *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation has come: The old has gone, the new has come!*

A word study will show that the words "in Christ" mean the same as "*submerged or immersed in*"

John the Baptist said:

Matt 3:11

¹¹ *“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*

What is the significance of baptism, if we already have the Holy Spirit in us?

Jesus answered that question:

Acts 1:8.

⁸ *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you*

It is about power! Being clothed in power! Power for service! Power from on high to do what we could never have done on our own!

Jesus Himself was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power.

Acts 10:37-38

³⁷ *You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*

So whether we are talking about the Holy Spirit coming upon us, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, or being baptized in the Holy Spirit...

Baptism in the Holy Spirit occurs when believers are *filled, immersed, and empowered by the Holy Spirit*

Empowered for service! Empowered for incredible works!

That word for power in Greek is *dunamis*:

Translated, means *power, might, and ability.*

The baptism of the Holy Spirit gives us the *power and ability* to fulfill a God-sized destiny

(a power and ability we do not have on our own)

It is what Jesus meant in John 7:38-39

³⁸ *Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.* ³⁹ *By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.*

In other words....the Holy Spirit “in” you as a believer helps you mature and grow in the fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control)

But the Holy Spirit “upon” you is for service...where the gifts of the Spirit empower you to do what you could never do on your own.

I tell you....a person who has the Holy Spirit “in” them, bearing fruit and growing in the Word of God, **and** fully immersed in the Holy Spirit, operating with supernatural ability and power as the Spirit leads and sees fit....

You have a powerful combination! You will see a person ready to have weakness turned to strength, ashes traded for beauty, sorrow for joy and brokenness to wholeness! And more than that....you will see a person ready to take that message of freedom to a lost and dying world!

Another way of looking at the baptism of the Holy Spirit....

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is *under the influence* of the Holy Spirit

Many people are saved, but do not appear to be “under the influence” of the Holy Spirit

Question: *We as believers may “have” the Holy Spirit...but does the Holy Spirit “have” us?”*

There’s a big difference! The difference between having power in our lives and not having power!

The difference between squeaking and limping our way to heaven and living a life of power

I prefer power! How about you? This is who we are and who we are called to be!

In conclusion:

So, **How do we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit?**

First of all.....it's **By faith and by grace**...it is a gift from the Father

It is not by our business, good deeds, or anything we bring to the table

4-point process (ROAR):

- **Repent (clean heart)**
- **Open our hearts (Have a desire)**

Psalm 63 A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah.

*¹ You, God, are my God,
earnestly I seek you;
I thirst for you,
my whole being longs for you,
in a dry and parched land
where there is no water.*

- **Ask**

Luke 11:13

*¹³ If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,
how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask
him!"*

And lastly:

- **Receive (yield)**

We also asked the question: *Who is the Holy Spirit?*

And we established: *The Holy Spirit is a person*

Holy Spirit is not an "It"

He is not a rush of warm and fuzzy feelings
He is not a *symbol* of God's power
He is not just the *goodness* in each of us
He is not *fond memories* or *good experiences*
And He is not some vague cosmic force.

The Holy Spirit is a real person who loves and cares for you. He came to make a difference in your life.

We also said: *He is “in” you if you are a believer!*

1 Corinthians 6:19

¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own

We are not our own! And we are not on our own!

When we became believers, the Holy Spirit moved in and took up residence. Basically.....it's no longer about us!

Tonight: We will look a little further into the question of the Holy Spirit before we move on.

We established that the Holy Spirit is the presence of God in us as believers.

And there is an interesting perspective when you combine 1 Cor 6:19 with Acts 1:8 where Jesus promised the coming Holy Spirit:

Acts 1:8

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you

1 Corinthians 6:19

¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own

God's power and presence dwell in us in the person of the Holy Spirit

Another important attribute about the Holy Spirit we must understand:

The Holy Spirit is the 3rd person of the Trinity

Trinity (from Latin *trinitas* or *trinus* meaning "threefold"):

The doctrine of the Trinity defines God as one God in three Persons: The Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit; one God in three Persons. The three Persons are distinct, yet are one substance, essence, or nature.

This is also referred to as the Godhead – Three in One – The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

The three Persons of the Trinity are *co-equal, co-existent, and co-eternal*

i.e. Each is God, wholly and entirely. And each works in complete union and harmony with the other.

From Creation to the Cross, and from the cross unto eternity, we see God's grace interacting with us through the interaction of all three divine Persons, in which each demonstrates what is proper to Him in the Trinity, so that:

All things are *from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit.*

For example – The Creation:

Genesis 1:1-2

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Get that – “Spirit of God” So we know the Holy Spirit was there at Creation

Now look at John 1

John 1:1-3

The Word Became Flesh

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

And v14 John 1:14

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

From these we see God (Jehovah – Elohim)

Or, more to the point – the Hebrew name of God in this context - *Elohay Kedem - God of the Beginning*

We see this same God operating in three persons – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit

We see that all things were made "from the Father", "through the Son" and "in the Holy Spirit".

This is often confusing to people.

Common analogy of water – fluid, ice, steam **(show pic)**

Each is distinct, with different purposes and benefits - *Yet they are all water*

It's a decent analogy – but falls so short of the majesty and magnificence of true essence of the Holy Trinity

A better way of looking at the Trinity:

God the Father – *Nurturer*

God the Son – *Protector*

God the Spirit – *Encourager*

Let's look at each:

God the Father – *Nurturer*

Nurture: To nourish; to help something to grow and develop by providing food, shelter, protection, and love; to hold closely

He is our “essentials kit”

He is Jehovah Jireh, our Provider

He provided manna from heaven for His people in the desert,
and still provides for us today

Philippians 4:19

¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

God is also a mighty fortress and a shelter in the storm

The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run into it and they are saved

Psalm 91:1-2

*¹ Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. ^[a]*

*² I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust.”*

What a beautiful picture...our nurturing, loving heavenly Father, who loves us with an everlasting love....who dotes over us....who dances over us....who is our rock and our refuge!

In short.....He is our Father. More than that...He’s our daddy! He’s papa! And He invites us up on His lap! He wants to hear all about our day and when we are hurting He is closer than ever!

God the Son – Protector

Protect: To keep something from being lost or harmed from an outside threat; to cover of shield

2 Corinthians 5:21

21 God made him who had no sin to be sin[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Christ, who knew no sin, actually *became* sin. Our sin. He took it upon Himself. Why? So we might become *His* righteousness!

He traded His righteousness for our darkness...all of it!
He did it willingly, and knowingly....in other words, He knew why He
came...He came to do for us what we could not do for ourselves! To save us

Hebrews 12:2

²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus endured it for us.....why? For the joy set before Him.....the joy of seeing us reconciled to God, the joy of seeing us free!! the joy of seeing us spend eternity with His Daddy!

It was worth it to Him....**You were worth it to Him!**

He took the bullet for us....He fought the bully in our place.

He took the beating we deserved so that we could get the ice cream cone He deserved.

He is our Protector, our Redeemer, our Savior, and our Shield

And the Bible says He sat down at the right hand of the throne of God and is interceding for us even now!

He is our Protector!

Jesus left His heavenly prerogatives and came in humility as a babe in the manger – but He is coming again with vengeance and fire in His eyes for His bride, the Church.....hallelujah!

God the Spirit – *Encourager*

Encourage: *To give support, guidance, confidence, or hope to someone.*

And that is what the Holy Spirit does!

Hallelujah! And these are just the tip of the iceberg of how the Holy Spirit works in us and through us. In fact...it's limitless!

“The deity of the Holy Spirit ought to be clearly recognized in Scripture. Look at these facts: Christ is born; the Spirit is His forerunner. Christ is baptized; the Spirit bears witness. Christ is tempted; the Spirit leads Him up. Christ ascends; the Spirit takes His place. What great things are there in the character of God which are not found in the Spirit? What titles which belong to God are not also applied to Him? He is called the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the mind of Christ, the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of adoption, of truth, of liberty; the Spirit of wisdom, of understanding, of counsel, of might, of knowledge, of godliness, of the fear of God. This only begins to show how unlimited He is.”

Gregory of Nazianzus.

And it’s especially amazing in light of what we learned last week:

We are not our own! And we are not on our own!

When we became believers, the Holy Spirit moved in and took up residence. He is in us and with us wherever we go.

So this business of encouraging....this giving support, guidance, confidence and hope....

It’s an inside job! (possible stopping place)**

Whereas:

Jesus – God *with* us (Emanuel)

Holy Spirit – God *in* us

We have to get this!

Because, the enemy doesn’t want us knowing that!

Remember.....Satan wants us think we are on our own

***And when we think we are on our own.....we act accordingly**

But we are *not* our own! And we are *not* on our own!

This is when we remember:

God’s power and presence dwell in us in the person of the Holy Spirit

God's presence in us - The Holy Spirit - is in us and with us, giving us support, guidance, confidence, and hope

And it's limitless!

***That means that we can identify messages we are hearing that are contrary to that and categorically know they are not from God!**

So, when shame says:

God is mad at me....I'm a disappointment...I'm a failure... I knew I'd screw this up...I deserve what's happening

God reminds us through His Holy Spirit:

Isaiah 54:9-10

⁹ *"To me this is like the days of Noah,
when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth.
So now I have sworn not to be angry with you,
never to rebuke you again.
¹⁰ Though the mountains be shaken
and the hills be removed,
yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken
nor my covenant of peace be removed,"
says the LORD, who has compassion on you.*

When defeat says:

I can't do it, I'll never succeed at anything

God reminds us through His Holy Spirit:

Philippians 4:13

¹³ *I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

When condemnation says:

You are defined by your past

God reminds us through His Holy Spirit:

Isaiah 43:18-19

¹⁸ *“Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past.
¹⁹ See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland.*

and Isaiah 65:17

¹⁷ *“....The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.*

When fear says:

*Holy cow, what I’m facing is scary. I don’t know what to do. I tried to pray,
but I can’t stop worrying. I mean, I know God says He’ll help, but what if
He doesn’t?*

God reminds us through His Holy Spirit:

Isaiah 41:10

¹⁰ *So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

When doubt says:

I have no idea what to do. I am so confused.

God reminds us through His Holy Spirit:

Psalm 32:8

⁸ *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.*

When discouragement says:

Man, all I want to do is give up and run for the hills

God reminds us through His Holy Spirit:

Deut 31:6

⁶ Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

And in our moment of despair, when the flame of hope has been reduced to a sad little glimmer, barely staying lit:

God reminds us through His Holy Spirit:

Hang in there....I haven't forgotten you. You'll see. I have a great plan for you, and it is to prosper you – not harm you. I am doing something good in this crisis, you just can't see it now. Remember, I said in my Word No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what I have in store for you. My plans are to give you hope and a future. All I ask is for you to trust Me, place your hope in Me, and step out in faith. You will never be the same.

In closing: A good practical way to look at the Trinity:

God the Father loves us and wants a relationship with us.

And He does it *through* His Son and *in* the Holy Spirit

*8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;***(Let's stop right there. Remember, last week we saw that Luke 24 also references this encounter. Let's go back and read Luke 24:45-49**

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on

the third day,⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

So in Luke’s first book, he documents the encounter with Jesus saying *but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.*

And then later, in his second volume, the Book of Acts, he says *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you*

When we look at both statements, *clothed with power from on high...receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you...we see a directional infusing of power. From the Holy Spirit to them.*

This had nothing to do with the apostles themselves...or their abilities. Jesus wasn’t telling them to get their act together, pull themselves up by their bootstraps...He wasn’t saying that they need to study more, or stop slouching and stand up straight. He was saying something heavenly was about to happen...Jesus was about to leave them physically so that the promised Holy Spirit could come...but notice, it wasn’t that the HS was going to come hang out with them....come to be among them...what does it say? The HS was going to come “on” them.

Now notice what we read last week in vv4-5 of Acts 1:

4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with[b] the Holy Spirit.”

Now He is using slightly different terminology: *Baptized with the HS*

And as we move forward in the vision God has given us, I am convinced we have only seen the tip of the iceberg in terms of what God wants to do. Wouldn't it be nice to be a part of a church where:

-Signs and wonders, healing, wholeness, marriages restored, people walking away from life-long destructive mindsets and habits.

That's a Spirit-led church....a Spirit-filled church

But I venture to say there are those here that don't even know what I mean when I say these words. And even for those of us that do know....do we "really" know? I mean do we have an intimate working knowledge?

Do we truly know the power we have in our corner?

Do we use that power or rely on our own intuition and resources?

Do we know the Source of the power?

So, in this series, we are going back-to-the basics (show pic)

And we are going to address questions such as:

-Who is the Holy Spirit? (or *what* is it?)

-What does the Holy Spirit have to do with me?

-How long has the HS been around?

-What role does He play in our lives?

-What is His work on this earth?

-When did He first show up? At Pentecost in 2nd Chapter of Acts?

-What does being led by the Spirit mean?

- What does being filled with the Spirit mean?

-What are the Gifts of the Spirit?

- What does the term *Charismatic* mean? What does *Pentecostal* mean?
- What are the *Fruits of the Spirit* and why are they called that?
- What does it mean to blaspheme the Holy Spirit?

See, I believe it is time for this church to grow a couple notches.

...for us to realize who we are....but more importantly, Whose we are

Time to realize the precious gift we have been given

Paul said to the Ephesian church:

Ephesians 1:3

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

And one of those gifts is the Holy Spirit....and I am convinced we haven't even scratched the surface yet in what it means to have the Holy Spirit active in our lives.....what a true Spirit-filled and Spirit-led life really looks like....what a man or woman operating in their Spiritual gifts is capable of

And how a Spirit-filled, Spirit-led church can explode and set a city on fire

Well, I believe our time is now!

I believe as we move forward in the vision for this church, as we become Crossover Church of God, as we step out into the Great Unknown of what God has for us....we need the Holy Spirit now more than ever!

We are going to see... Signs and wonders, healing, wholeness, marriages restored, people walking away from life-long destructive mindsets and habits.

We will see both deliverance and inner healing of emotional wounds (expand on)

And we need both....and the Holy Spirit is need in both

But many Christians don't really know anything about the Holy Spirit (intimately know)

In fact:

A study conducted by the Barna Group in 2009:

Suggests that Americans who consider themselves to be Christian have a diverse set of beliefs – but many of those beliefs are contradictory or, at least, inconsistent.

The survey explored beliefs about spiritual beings, the influence of faith on their life, views of the Bible, and reactions to faiths other than their own.

All self-described Christians surveyed were asked about their perception of God. In total, three-quarters (78%) said he is the “all-powerful, all-knowing Creator of the universe who rules the world today.” The remaining one-quarter chose other descriptions of God – depictions that are not consistent with biblical teaching (e.g., everyone is god, or that "god" refers to the realization of human potential, etc.).

Many Christians in the survey do not believe that the Holy Spirit is a living force, either. Approx 1/3 of those surveyed believed that the Holy Spirit is “a *symbol* of God’s power or presence, but is not a living entity.”

Heart breaking!

Well, in this series, I aim to open your eyes to the Wonderful Holy Spirit, and how He plays a major role in where we are going as a congregation....and I plan to use a lot of scripture to back it up.

Today, I'm just going to tackle just one main topic:

And that is:

The Holy Spirit is a person

Holy Spirit is not an “It”

He is not a rush of warm and fuzzy feelings

He is not a *symbol* of God's power

He is not just the *goodness* in each of us

He is not *fond memories* or *good experiences*

And He is not some vague cosmic force.

The Holy Spirit is a real person who loves and cares for you. He came to make a difference in your life.

In the book of John alone, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit in terms of a pronoun or personal noun almost 20 times

Just one example:

John 14:16-17

¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

Notice “HE” “HIM” (reshow with highlights)

The Holy Spirit is a person, with a personality, character, attributes, feelings, and purpose.

The Holy Spirit:

- Leads
- Instructs
- Guides
- Intercedes
- Convicts (not condemns)
- Directs and appoints
- Assigns gifts
- Speaks

He can be insulted and even grieved

He is a person in every sense of the word

More on this in the next few weeks

But today, I want to direct your attention to the words in the last verse.

But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

He is “in” you if you are a believer!

Paul said:

1 Corinthians 6:19

¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own

We are not our own!

When we became believers, the Holy Spirit moved in and took up residence. Basically.....it’s no longer about us!

He is with us and in us, everywhere we go and in each circumstance. No matter what we face, the Holy Spirit is there with us. We are not alone. Hallelujah!!

But on the flip side.... He is with us and in us, everywhere we go and in each circumstance. No matter what we face, the Holy Spirit is there with us. We are not alone.

What I mean is that when “life” happens (remember last week....seasons?) when people disappoint us, when trouble occurs, when we want to judge others, make snide comments about others, fix others, lash out at others, get even with others, stonewall others, manipulate, aggravate, or even capitulate....or when we are tempted to give in to temptation or even run for hills.....we have to remember...

We don’t have that right anymore....we are not our own! Its not about us anymore....it’s about the pleasing the Holy Spirit who lives in us!

He sees what we see, experiences what we experience.

He knows what we are doing even before we do it. He knows our thoughts and attitudes, He see our bitterness and unforgiveness, He knows the animosity we harbor....and we subject Him to it all.....because He is in us!

Look at the Message version of what I just read:

1 Corinthians 6:19 (The Message)

Or didn't you realize that your body is a sacred place, the place of the Holy Spirit? Don't you see that you can't live however you please, squandering what God paid such a high price for? The physical part of you is not some piece of property belonging to the spiritual part of you. God owns the whole works. So let people see God in and through your body.

Oh, that we can see that! To want to please God in all we do and say...and that the world could see God in us!

***But Satan doesn't want you to know that.**

The news I'm presenting to you today is absolutely counter to what Satan wants you to know.

He wants you to think you're on your own...that you have to figure it out on your own...he wants us to act on our own, independent of the Holy Spirit

He does this by:

- **Appealing to our shame** (*God is mad at me....I'm a disappointment...I'm a failure... I knew I'd screw this up...I deserve this...or because of loss and trauma in our lives we have abandonment issues, every good thing in my life has been taking away, this will be taken away too, so I guess I'm on my own*)

- **Appealing to our fear** (*Holy cow, what I'm facing is scary. I don't know what to do. I tried to pray, but I can't stop worrying. I mean, I know God says He'll help, but what if He doesn't? I guess I'm on my own*)
- **Appealing to our human sense of justice** (we are so used to fighting for everything....life has always been an uphill battle...people will hurt us, so we need to keep our guard up...not trust anyone... and make our own way...after all, if we don't look out for ourselves, who will? So, we assume it's us against the world...we assume we're on our own)
- **Appealing to our human desires** (lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life. Just like the world we live in, if we get caught up in our flesh, we want, want, want. We want what we want. It feels good, it scratches our itch. It's at that time we bite on the Enemy's lies, such as "*Hey, it's no big deal, nobody will know. After all, you have needs too. You have to watch out for numero uno....nobody else will. Go ahead, try the fruit.*" And before you write me off, I'm not just talking about drinking, drugs, or lustful things. How about our desires for success, and we think it's all up to us to get it? Destination mentality. Or, because of our brokenness, we develop a stubborn streak that believes we must be control of everything and everybody in our lives, and in an effort to do so, we choke the very life out of it) (isn't it funny how when we have major control issues, we usually end up losing the very things we try to control?)

These are just a few examples. And they are all products of our brokenness.

And when we act on our own, independent of the Holy Spirit, we are acting out our brokenness! Period! And then we wonder why our lives are such a mess!!

That's why at times like these, we need something bigger than we are....and that *something* is the truth that we are no longer our own, and we are no longer *on* our own.

Let me be blunt about this:

We are plain and simply acting out of stubbornness and selfishness when we act on our own, independently of the Holy Spirit.

I'm going to be blunt again (and probably offend everyone):

We have no right to harbor unforgiveness....we are not our own

We have no right to get even....we are not our own

We have no right to harbor anger....we are not our own

We have no right to lash out, yell, or scream (spouse, family)

We have no right to live vicariously through our children and try to harangue them into compliance

We have no right to give in to fear and worry....we are not our own

We have no right to manipulate relationships to maintain control...we are...

We have no right to turn to the bottle or drugs....we are not our own

We have no right to get our identity from money or success...we are...

We have no right to covet what others have....we are not our own

We have no right to turn to lust....we are not our own

We have no right to turn to sex outside of marriage...we are....

We have no right to fool around and see how close we can get to the fire without being burned...

We have no right to take that second and third look when your spouse isn't around...

We have no right to watch raunchy movies and TV shows and say "*It's no big deal, it's just a show.....everyone else does it*"

We have no right to dream what it would be like to be married to someone else....we are not our own

We have no right run, hide, or withhold ourselves from our spouses

We have no right to keep bringing up the past (Historians or Ambassadors or Goodwill?)

We have no right to talk about others under our breath

We have no right to murmur, gossip, or rehearse our hurts

And we have no right living a lukewarm, complacent, and passive Christian life because we just want to be comfortable....we are not our own

But see, if we are operating in the flesh like Satan wants, we believe we have full rights to these, don't we?

We are not our own!!! We must get that.

Here's another point:

Without the Holy Spirit, there is no unity

We will not have unity in our homes, our marriages, or in this church without the Holy Spirit.

Without the healing and wholeness that comes from the Holy Spirit's residence and ministry in our lives, we are left our own devices.....and we get what we get. Scary!

And that's exactly why Satan doesn't want us to know who we are and Whose we are!

In conclusion:

We are triune beings (show diagram) (means consisting of three in one)

The "real us" – our identity is in the spirit man. But Satan's intent is to convince us the "real us" in in the flesh....and to operate in the flesh.

And our human tendency will always be bent toward the flesh. It shouldn't come as a surprise. But Satan knows it, and that's why he has such an easy time getting us.

Gal 5:16-17

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

Bottom line.....we are not our own.

We have a Heavenly Stowaway! A hijacker on board, He has taken control of the steering wheel and is plotting a new course. But it is a beautiful and fulfilling course. This hijacker is for us and not against us. And His presence in our lives is essential to becoming the people of God we are called to be.....essential to having the marriages we desire.....essential to being the parents we were called to be...essential to being the powerful church we are called to be.

Look at this quote from Bill Bright.

“The Holy Spirit was given to live inside those who believe in Jesus, in order to produce God's character in the life of a believer. In a way that we cannot do on our own, the Holy Spirit will build into our lives love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). Rather than trying to be loving, patient, kind, God asks us to rely on Him to produce these qualities in our lives. Thus Christians are told to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25) and be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). And the Holy Spirit empowers Christians to perform ministerial duties that promote spiritual growth among Christians (Rom. 12; 1Cor. 12; Eph. 4)”.

Practical way of looking at the Trinity:

God the Father – Nurturer

God the Son – Protector

God the Spirit – Encourager

“The deity of the Holy Spirit ought to be clearly recognized in Scripture. Look at these facts: Christ is born; the Spirit is His forerunner. Christ is baptized; the Spirit bears witness. Christ is tempted; the Spirit leads Him up. Christ ascends; the Spirit takes His place. What great things are there in the character of God which are not found in the Spirit? What titles which belong to God are not also applied to Him? He is called the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the mind of Christ, the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of adoption, of truth, of liberty; the Spirit of wisdom, of understanding, of counsel, of might, of knowledge, of godliness, of the fear of God. This only begins to show how unlimited He is.”

Gregory of Nazianzus.

) and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

The Holy Spirit:

- Leads
- Instructs
- Guides
- Intercedes
- Convicts (not condemns)
- Directs and appoints
- Assigns gifts
- Speaks

Nest week: Baptizing in the HS (v5) and then v8. Past Holy Spirit messages.

Can you imagine if they didn't "wait in jerusalm"?