

GATECITY CHURCH

THE BOOK OF ACTS, PT. 5

MIRACLES, BOLDNESS, PERSECUTION, COMMUNITY - ACTS 3-5

FEBRUARY 16TH, 2025 – BILLY HUMPHREY

I. Introduction

- A. This week we are going to cover Acts chapters 3 to 5. Up to this point in the book, we have seen Jesus' commission to the Church, the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost, and the foundational spiritual rhythms of the newly formed Christian Community (Teaching, Fellowship, Prayer, Communion, Generosity, Evangelism)
- B. To set the stage, the time between the end of Acts 2 and the beginning of Acts 3 is a few weeks (2-6 weeks). Acts 3-4 takes place in 2 days. While Acts 5 likely covers another month or so (4-8 weeks). This is all happening within the first several months of the New Testament Church's formation.
- C. A key thought is that the expansion of the Church and the manifestation of God's power was happening rapidly. The Holy Spirit was moving daily with miracles, signs and wonders, and the community was growing, while they were being bold witnesses and experiencing real persecution. This was a time of incredible acceleration and power along with persecution and trial. Yet the Church was filled with joy and thriving.

II. Overview of Acts 3-5

- A. Remember, because of the outpouring on Pentecost, 3,000 people were added to the Church in one day. By the end of Acts chapter 2, the believers were meeting daily in the temple and house to house, they were devoted to prayer, teaching, and fellowship the Lord was, "adding to the Church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).
- B. The narrative picks up in Acts 3 where Peter and John are going to the temple at around 3pm, the time of evening prayer. As they were entering the Temple, Peter and John encounter a man who had been lame his whole life, begging at the temple gate. It is likely that they had seen this man many times before because He was laid daily at the beautiful gate of the Temple (aka, the Eastern Gate or the Golden Gate). The man was instantly healed and entered the temple, walking, leaping and praising God. A crowd gathered and was filled with amazement, because they all knew him as the lame man, but now he was healed.
- C. Peter boldly preached His second sermon, calling people to repentance. While he was preaching, the captain of the temple came along with some Sadducees and they arrested Peter and John.

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- D. This moment was the first large scale catalyst since Pentecost several thousand more people believed in Jesus as a result of the miracle and Peter's preaching ("Number of men" may refer to only men or men and women. If it was only men, the total number of believers may have exceeded 10,000).
- E. The next morning, Peter and John stood before the same Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly declares, "Salvation is found in no one else but Jesus" (Acts 4:12). The leaders are stunned but cannot deny the miracle. They recognize that Peter and John were "uneducated and untrained men" but also that "they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).
- F. They threatened them, forbidding them to speak or teach in the name of Jesus anymore. Peter and John answered, "Whether it is right to obey you or God you be the judge, we cannot help but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). After they further threatened them, they let them go.
- G. The Church responded with prayer—not for safety, but for more boldness, and as a result, the power of God descended upon them again as it did at Pentecost, shaking the whole place where they were assembled (Acts 4:31). They were again filled with the Holy Spirit and filled with boldness.
- H. Great unity and community continued to grow within the Church as they shared everything, ensuring that no one lacked anything. Great power was manifested through the apostles and they experienced the grace of God in abundance.
- I. Radical generosity broke out among the believers, as many sold properties and houses to make sure the needs of all in the community were being met. Undoubtedly there were great needs as many were being ostracized from family and friends because of their allegiance to Jesus. Barnabas, notably, sold land and gave the money freely to provide for anyone who had needs.
- J. This is the context by which we get the story of Ananias and Sapphira who lied about their offering—pretending to give all but keeping some back. Peter confronted them, they both fell dead in the presence of God. Holy fear fell upon the Church, while the fire of God's manifest presence intensified, as well as the signs and wonders that were being done by the apostles. More and more believers were added to the Church.
- K. As the miracles multiplied, people brought the sick into the streets, hoping Peter's shadow would heal them. The religious leaders arrested the apostles out of jealousy. An angel of the Lord released them at night, commanding them to keep preaching. The next morning, they were back in the temple, preaching boldly.

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- L. The apostles were arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin again. Peter refuse to back down saying, “We must obey God rather than men.” The leaders were enraged and wanted to execute them, but Gamaliel warned them, “If this is from God, you cannot stop it” (Acts 5:39). Instead of killing them, they beat them and let them go. The apostles rejoiced that they were “counted worthy to suffer” for Jesus—and they continued preaching daily.

III. The Pattern: Miracles → Boldness → Persecution → Community

- A. In Acts 3-4, we see a unique sequence that is repeated multiple times throughout the book of Acts. While there are a few instances that the sequence varies, the general pattern remains the same: miracles ignite boldness in preaching, bold preaching in turn stirs up persecution, and persecution then draws the believers into tighter knit community.
- B. There are at least eight unique examples where this progression unfolded in this way. (Act 2-3, Acts 3-4, Acts 6-8, Acts 9, Acts 12, Acts 13-14, Acts 16)
- C. At times the pattern varies, where we see miracles, persecution, boldness, then community. But in general, the core elements remain.
 - 1. God moves powerfully (Miracles)
 - 2. The Gospel is proclaimed (Preaching/Boldness)
 - 3. Opposition to the message (Persecution)
 - 4. The Church grows together (Community)
- D. This process is not formulaic, but it is consistent. Sometimes persecution precedes bold proclamation, other times bold proclamation brings persecution.
- E. I think the takeaway for us is that if we are going to thrive like the Church in the book of Acts, this is where our faith must be set: God wants to do the miraculous, which should inspire us to boldly declare Jesus, which at times will bring opposition and persecution, which ultimately it calls us together in community and strength with one another.
- F. We see this pattern clearly in the healing of the lame man (Acts 3:1-10), which is followed by Peter’s bold proclamation of the Gospel in the temple. (Acts 3:11-26). Opposition then arises from the authorities (Acts 4:1-3). The Church then responds in unity through prayer and radical generosity (Acts 4:23-37).

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IV. Acts 5: Glory in the Midst

- A. At Pentecost, the fire fell upon them (Acts 2). Now, in Acts 5, the glory had begun to manifest in their midst.
- B. Just as in the Old Testament where God's glory filled the temple, now His presence was filling the Church and manifesting in power.
- C. The Church is the new Temple and the place of God's habitation. Ephesians 2:20-22 describes that we are built together as a dwelling place for God in the Spirit. What we see in Acts 5, is in my opinion, the high watermark of the Glory of God manifest in the Church in the book of Acts.
- D. Acts 5 mirrors Leviticus 10 (Nadab & Abihu) just as they came into the tabernacle and had sin in their lives and fell down dead. We see that same experience with Ananias and Sapphira.
- E. The signs and wonders were so significant that even Peter's shadow was healing the sick. Multitudes from the surrounding cities brought their sick and those with demons and they were all healed (Acts 5:16).
- F. I want to impress on your heart once again that there is so much more available to us today than what we see. If the disciples had this kind of power of God manifesting through them, how much more do we need the power of God manifest in our midst today?

V. Joy in Persecution

- A. By the end of Acts 5 the apostles had been arrested twice and brought before the Sanhedrin three times in a matter of weeks. This last time, they were not simply threatened, but they were also physically beaten. The persecution they experienced had gotten more severe. But with the increasing persecution, their resolve and conviction increased as well.
- B. They were flogged for preaching Jesus (Acts 5:40). But shockingly they left that place rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer (Acts 5:41). We have no record of them praying for the persecution to stop—but we do see them praying for an increase in miracles and boldness (Acts 4:29).
- C. Jesus had already prepared them for suffering. Matthew 5:10-12 says: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." and John 15:18-20 says: "If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you."

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D. The apostles continued preaching daily (Acts 5:42). Persecution became another catalyst for spreading the Gospel. The disciples' responses to persecution throughout the book of Acts are compelling:

1. Acts 4:29-31 - They prayed for boldness.
2. Acts 5:41 - They rejoiced in suffering.
3. Acts 8:1-4 - They were scattered and went preaching.
4. Acts 14:22 - Paul declared that through many tribulations we enter the Kingdom.