



THE ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

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A small ember faintly glowed in Jerusalem. A carpenter, seeming to be a common man, collected a few faithful followers showing them what life was meant to look like. But as soon as these followers caught His brilliant vision, their joy and hope would seem crushed upon a Roman cross, because the powers and principalities would stop at nothing to snuff out His beauty and goodness. This is not how most stories begin . . .

But just when it seemed as if the shadows had grown to replace the light, a tomb is robbed of it's death and a risen Savior illuminates hope. Now these followers of Jesus are called to pick up and carry the vision and movement forward into the darkness of this world. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, they carry the spark of Jesus' vision outward, proclaiming this Good News of a King on a Cross to their city, their people, their enemies, and to the ends of the earth. And what began as a glowing ember in an upper room would gather into a blazing and consuming firestorm of witness across time and space, telling the tale of this carpenter, this risen Savior, the very Son of God.

These are the Acts of the Apostles.

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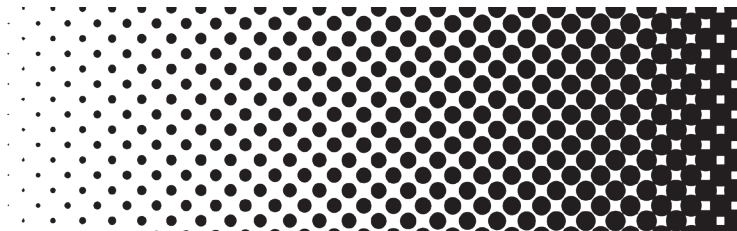
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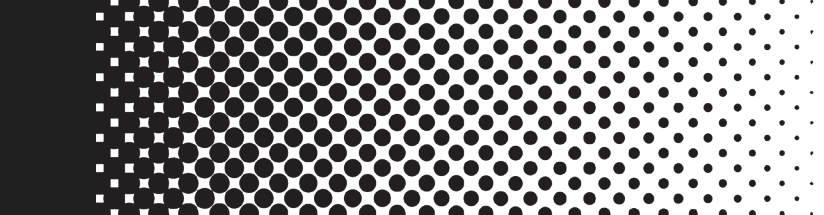
SESSION 1

¹In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ²until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

⁴And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord,





will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” ⁹And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

INTRODUCTION

The apostles have seen visions of Jesus' authority over heaven and earth in His ministry, but now He is taken up to His rightful place at the side of the Father. The apostles receive a promise of power that will enable them in a collective role, and that role will move outward in concentric circles to the world around them. Everything will change.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. After reading these 11 verses, what seems to be Luke's major point that the reader is supposed to understand? How does this relate to his previous writings?
2. What do you think the disciples meant when they asked if Jesus was "restoring the kingdom to Israel"? What would this require? What would it look like to them?
3. What is Jesus' response? What does Jesus want the apostles to focus on? How might Jesus' response still influence how we live today?
4. In your own words, what is the ascension of Jesus? What does it mean?

5. Can you find the Trinity in this passage? Explain why this might be important.
6. Read Luke 3:16-17, 21-22 and compare to Acts 1:4-5. Discuss the “promise” and the implications from Jesus’ actions in the Luke passage.
7. If we as Christians are “empowered for witness,” how would you say we are to accomplish this task?
8. How are you doing in your empowered witness? What are your main obstacles?
9. In Acts 1:8, there is a geographical expansion noted. How might it relate to the rest of the book? What is a Christian today supposed to take away from this verse?

THE SPARK OF THE FAITHFUL



The book begins with a promise of power and a vision of Jesus' departure, His ascension. But, the apostles still have questions that seem to reveal uncertainty, maybe even a lack of understanding. We are two thousand years removed from their culture and curiosity, but honestly, don't we have similar questions? But the reality is that after all this time, Christianity continues to thrive around the world. So, we don't always understand what is happening around us, but we can still rest in the knowledge that our God rules and reigns and that Jesus Christ is on the throne. Not only that, but aren't we called to live our lives differently? To witness to this King?

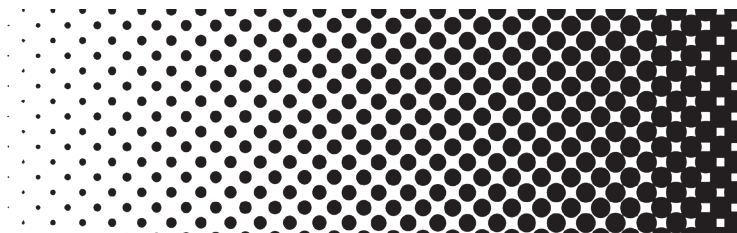
This week consider the promise of power, what the apostles were called to do, and what we are called to do. Our witness is still intended for the ends of the earth.

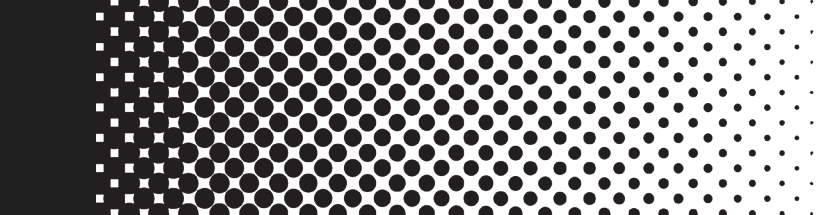
What will witnessing to God's authority and goodness look like for you this week?

SESSION 2

¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. ¹³And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

¹⁵In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, ¹⁶"Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry." ¹⁸(Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the





field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ²⁰“For it is written in the Book of Psalms,

“ ‘May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it’;
and

“ ‘Let another take his office.’

²¹So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²²beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” ²³And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” ²⁶And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

INTRODUCTION

Replacing an apostle seems like a pretty important task, especially when the one being replaced carried such infamy. The main credential required for such a replacement was to be a witness to the resurrection. This fact mattered and it still matters because the event serves as the center of our faith and we should all be a witness to the resurrection.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In this text, we learn where they were when Jesus ascended. Read Luke 19:28-40. How does this event connect to the ascension?
2. What else do you recall happened on the Mount of Olivet (another name for the “Mount of Olives”)?
3. They meet in an upper room. Consider the last time they were with Jesus in an upper room. Read Luke 22:7-34. Compare these moments.
4. Read Ezekiel 11:16-23. Describe what is happening in this scene. What is the state of Israel? What is the significance of the glory chariot leaving? What is the promise? How does it end? How might it relate to this location of Jesus’ ascension?
5. The Greek word behind “with one accord” is a term that shows up ten times in Acts. It means “united” or “together” with the idea of “same mind or passion” and is used of the followers of Christ and sometimes even refers to those that oppose them. Why might this be important in the book of Acts? How about in our Christian lives?

6. Have you created this kind of “accord” in your family? At your workplace? In your friend group? Describe what you did. What was the motivation at the center of the “accord”? What were you hoping would hold it together?
7. Look up the verses from Acts 1:20. How are they used by Peter here? What was the general idea from the Psalms that he quoted?
8. Are you comfortable with Acts 1:26? Explain. Now read Leviticus 16:6-10 and Joshua 18:8-10. There is precedent for such a process, but is it for every decision? Where does human responsibility before God come together with trust in God’s sovereignty in Acts 1:26?
9. Read Proverbs 16:33. What are the implications of this proverb? How do you reconcile God’s sovereignty in light of the events in your life? Is God in control of the bad things as well as the good? Explain.

THE SPARK OF THE FAITHFUL

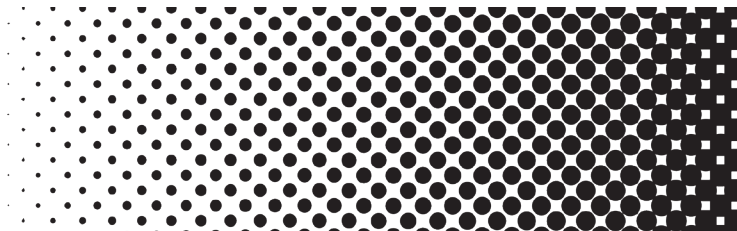


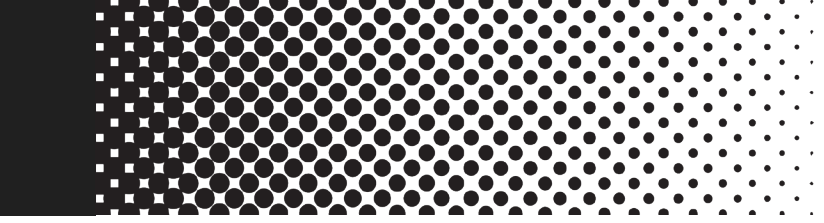
What's the next move? Jesus had said to wait. But what should be done in the waiting? In one accord with devotion to one another and to Jesus, they prayed. What a simple answer, and it is the answer that we often bypass. Every single one of them had no idea what was going to happen next. They collectively did not know. But they faithfully came together to raise their voices to the LORD. They chose to collectively trust that "all authority" had indeed been given to the Christ, so they started by trusting in prayer. How often do we choose not to pray? How often do we miss an opportunity to approach our good Father making requests for those around us? Find someone this week who you can join in prayer consistently, in one accord.

SESSION 3

¹When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

⁵Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these





who are speaking Galileans? ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” ¹²And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

INTRODUCTION

Fire. Tongues. For millennia, we can still struggle to find the fullness of what this means to the LORD's people. It is both strange and invigorating. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon God's people has received much discussion over the years, but we can be certain of one thing. This is the moment that Jesus spoke about. This is what His followers were waiting for.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Read Deuteronomy 16:9-12. The word pentecost means “fiftieth” and refers to this Old Testament Feast that happens 50 days after Passover. What was the purpose of the feast? Why would Passover and Pentecost be significant times for this Acts 2:1-13?
2. What would the city of Jerusalem look like during the feast of Pentecost?
3. Considering the purpose of the feast, could the Israelites celebrate Pentecost before they came into the Promised Land?
4. Read Exodus 19 and pay attention to timing. When did the Israelites leave Egypt? Approximately how long after leaving Egypt did the event in Exodus 19 take place? What is given in Exodus 20? How might this relate to Acts 2:1-13?

5. Read Exodus 13:21-22, 19:18, 24:17, and 40:38.
Considering the image of the LORD in Exodus 19, what might the image of “divided tongues as of fire” coming from heaven resting on them communicate?
6. Read Genesis 11:1-9. How might this be related to Acts 2:1-13?
7. Considering Acts 2:12-13, identify common responses when people do not understand what they are experiencing. Do you have an example from your own life that illustrates this?
8. What is the point of the multiple languages? What does it accomplish?

THE SPARK OF THE FAITHFUL

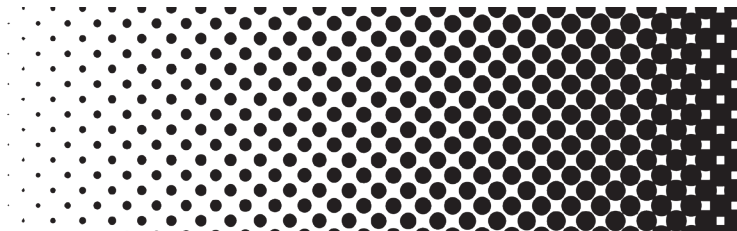


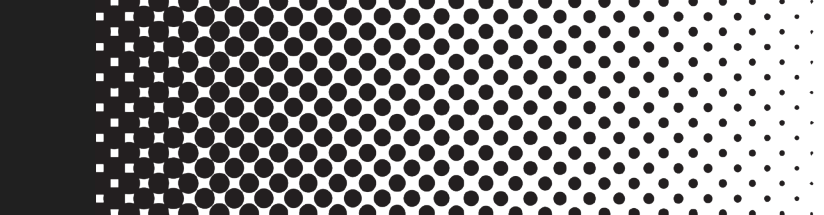
So many threads can be pulled together in this text. Pentecost is the celebration of the LORD's saving work and the giving the land to His people, the harvest of that land being a gift to them and thus an offering back. Fruitfulness. It also came to represent the receiving of the Law on a fiery Mount Sinai. Fire. That's right. If we think back to "fire" in the Old Testament, we are reminded of God's presence in a burning bush and the pillar of fire that would move and rest on the Tabernacle, the place where the LORD dwelt. This fire was God's presence, and now this fire, rests on His people. Even more mind-blowing, in a reversal of the Tower of Babel, these people are now empowered by His Spirit who has granted them "divided tongues" so that the good news would go to the ends of the Earth. That fire rests on you and me when we have submitted to this King and His kingdom. You are the Temple of the Holy Spirit. What does this mean in your life? What should change? What should you do differently this week?

SESSION 4

¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. ¹⁵For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷“ ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; ²⁰the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. ²¹And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

²²“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— ²³this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. ²⁵For David





says concerning him, “ ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; ²⁶therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. ²⁷For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. ²⁸You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

²⁹“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, ³¹he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. ³²This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. ³³Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. ³⁴For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, “ ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, ³⁵until I make your enemies your footstool.” ’

³⁶Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

INTRODUCTION

The power of Peter's message is staggering. He is getting to the heart of Old Testament prophecy and his audience knows the scriptures he is referencing. Through prophets, psalms, and drawing upon the name of David, Israel's greatest king, Peter paints a picture that will change the course of history.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Read the context around Joel 2:28-32. What is the Day of the LORD?
2. What parts of the Joel text is Peter identifying with the event that just happened in Acts 2:1-13. Boiled down, what is Peter telling them?
3. Read Luke 1:31-33. What are the two ways that Jesus is being identified? What does this coming together communicate?
4. Read 2 Samuel 7:1-17 to understand what Peter is explaining about Jesus' link to David in Acts 2:30 referring to Psalm 132:11. What are some other examples from the New Testament that you can think of that make this connection?

5. How would you define the “delivering up” of Jesus? Who did it? How do you respond to God’s “definite plan and foreknowledge” as it relates to Jesus’ death? How does this influence your thinking about other things that happen?
6. What is Peter communicating with Psalm 16:8-11? What is he trying to clarify for his audience and why?
7. Go back and read Psalm 110:1 and read Luke 20:41-44. What is Peter clarifying here and how is it similar to Psalm 16:8-11?
8. Have you ever felt like you were supposed to speak boldly about a truth that might be hard to hear by your audience? What did you do?

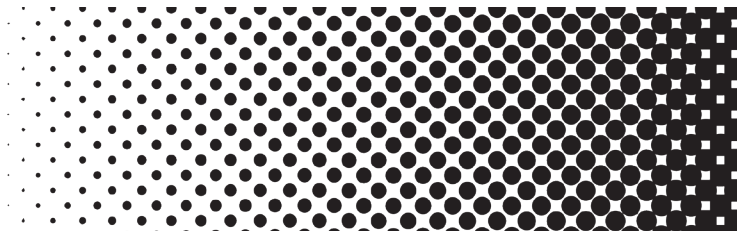
THE SPARK OF THE FAITHFUL

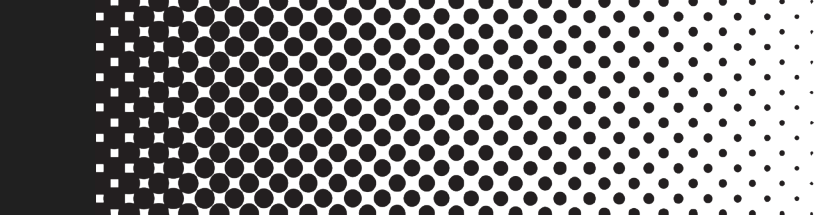


All of scripture gives voice to the fact that there is one King of the Cosmos. Peter knows it, and through the Holy Spirit he will boldly proclaim it. His proclamation will cut two ways. Many will see the truth and be changed forever. Many will see the truth, recognize how it undermines their selfish desires, and they will do anything to stop this movement. How have you responded? Did becoming a Christian make you more bold to proclaim the goodness of your Savior and King, or did things remain the same? When's the last time you spoke Jesus' name to the benefit of another? What's holding you back? Who do you know that needs to hear it?

SESSION 5

³⁷Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸And Peter said to them, “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. ³⁹For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” ⁴⁰And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” ⁴¹So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.





⁴²And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

INTRODUCTION

The response to the proclamation that Jesus is King is powerful. It cuts to the heart. It changes hearts. Forgiveness and empowerment to live differently in the middle of a wicked world is the promise. Peter is calling his people to this King and to His promises, and the more he proclaims this message, the more that come to see the truth and begin to live it out together.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How would you define Baptism and its purpose?
2. Have you ever felt “cut to the heart”? Explain. Discuss your experiences with repentance. What usually accompanies deep repentance?
3. What are the two effects of baptism from Peter’s words here? Do you think that is a full explanation? Explain.
4. Read Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4. What is “promise” referring to in these passages and here in Acts 2? Are there other promises from God that you often prioritize higher than this one?

5. After reading Acts 2:40-41 what more can we understand about baptism, repentance, and the Holy Spirit?
6. There are four things that the new believers were “devoted” to? List and describe them. How are they interrelated?
7. Compare Acts 2:22 and 2:43. What might this communicate?
8. Have you ever experienced a time when you had “all things in common”?
9. Compare Acts 2:41 and Acts 2:47. What seems to be happening and how would you explain it?

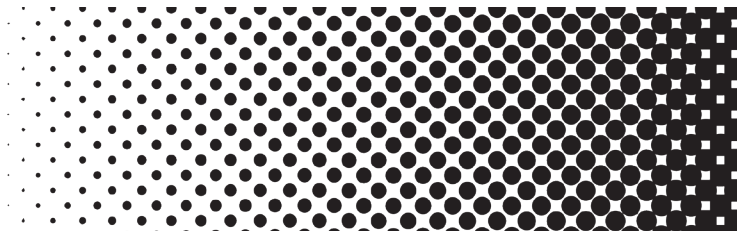
THE SPARK OF THE FAITHFUL

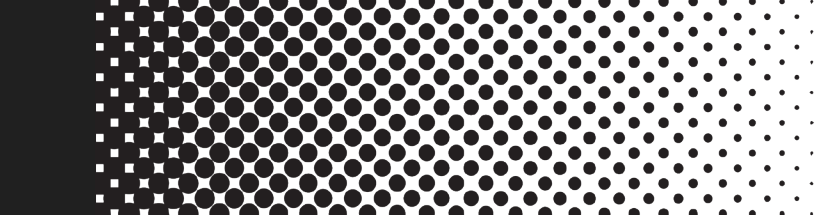


Repent and be baptized. If you are a Christian, you have felt the pull of these words. The world pulls us in the wrong directions, and we must turn from it and die to ourselves. But this is easier said than done. It requires something more than ourselves. We can't even forgive ourselves much of the time. The Spirit of the Living God is the One who saves. In Baptism, this is our declaration. We are done with our wickedness. We are following our King, and we know there is no other place to find forgiveness. There is no other place to find true life. Who do you know that needs to come to the waters of baptism? Who do you know that needs forgiveness and new life? Invite them.

SESSION 6

¹Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. ²And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. ³Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. ⁴And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” ⁵And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶But Peter said, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!”





⁷And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. ⁸And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. ⁹And all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

INTRODUCTION

In a Western materialist culture, we often don't know what to do with the miraculous. This man is "lame from birth" so his affliction was well-known by any and all passers-by. His condition had become accepted and so was his lot in life. Everyone accepted it. What happens when Peter and John, empowered by the Holy Spirit and readied for kingdom action, pass by? That which is normal changes.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Last session and continuing into this session, much of the interaction takes place at the temple. Reading Jesus' words in Luke 19:45-48 in light of Acts 2, why would this be an interesting location for ongoing interaction?
2. What are "alms"?
3. Consider the "lame man from birth." How does the idea that his condition "since birth" might play into the situation?
4. Is healing the norm? Is it promised? What is the purpose of stories like this one in Acts?

5. How do you react to those like this lame man who have such massive needs?
6. What is the appropriate motivation for generosity? What are bad motivations?
7. Here Peter and John participate in a specifically miraculous event. What do you think of miracles?
8. Read Isaiah 58:6-7 and Micah 4:6-7. How does the LORD feel about those that are afflicted? What does this passage tell us about the remedy God enables?

THE SPARK OF THE FAITHFUL

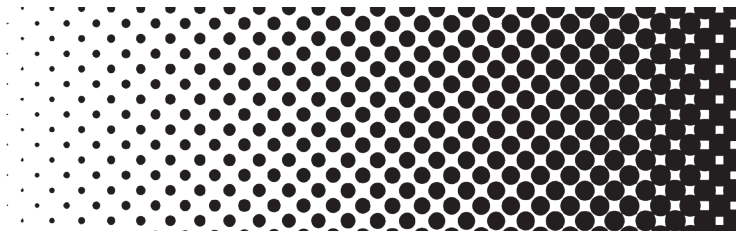


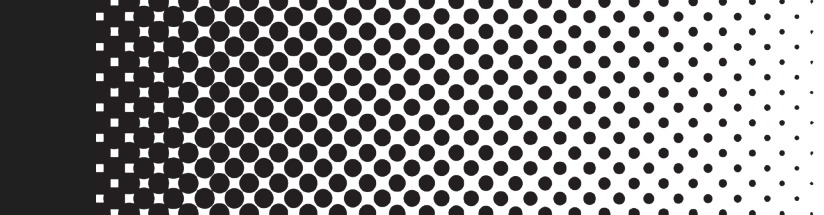
When Peter and John come to this man and heal him, they are bringing him something unexpected. The lame man accepted his affliction. It was all he knew. But Peter and John imagine a kingdom of no ordinary generosity, but the Kingdom of Jesus where all will be put right. What would it look like for this man to experience that kind of kingdom? What would be the image that God would use to show those around him (and us) what “putting right” looks like in His eyes? God reveals His glory in many different ways, sometimes in miraculous healing. What was true from birth was made untrue. This is the greater point. The kingdom of God is about order. It pushes back chaos. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Christians push back chaos and reveal a different place in all of their word and deed. They see and remedy disorder in their own lives and in the lives of others. Are we extraordinarily generous with what we have been given? Your prayers and gifts may not include healing, but they can create a bit of kingdom order and show someone what is to come. How can you enter someone’s life today with what you have been given?

SESSION 7

¹¹While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. ¹²And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. ¹⁴But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

¹⁷"And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸But what God foretold by the mouth





of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. ²²Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you.’ ²³And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’ ²⁴And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. ²⁵You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ ²⁶God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.”

INTRODUCTION

Whoa! Peter's at it again. A crowd gathers after seeing the lame man healed, and Peter wants them to know that it is not shocking when they consider their own origin story with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The shocking thing is that the power behind this act comes from the "Author of life" whom Peter says, the people of Israel "delivered over," "denied," and "killed."

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the point Peter is making in Acts 3:12-13? Why is this point so important considering it is said to the “Men of Israel”?
2. This is the first time in Acts that Jesus is referred to as “servant.” Read Luke 20:9-18. How does this image of a servant in a parable compare to what Peter is saying here in Acts?
3. Read Exodus 14:26-31. Compare and contrast Moses and Jesus as “servants.”
4. Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12. When an Israelite heard “servant” how might this text inform their understanding?

5. From where is Peter saying strength comes? Do you agree? How have you ever asked for strength in this way? Explain.
6. Compare Acts 3:19-20 with Acts 2:38. How is the idea of repentance expanded upon?
7. Can you think of any other prophets that “proclaimed these days” as noted in Acts 3:24? Give specific examples from scripture if you can.
8. Acts 3:25-26 serves almost as an accusation. What is the likely response? Have you ever had a true accusation raised against you? How did you respond?

THE SPARK OF THE FAITHFUL

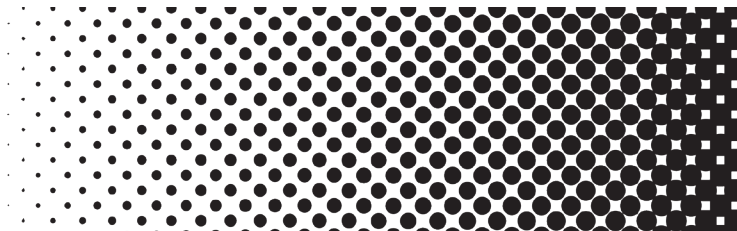


Peter is telling his people that God's faithfulness has come again to them, regardless of their ignorance. Imagine a king who has a son, a prince. Imagine someone killing that prince regardless of intention. What is within the rights of the king? What is within his power as the sole sovereign of his kingdom? He would destroy the perpetrators of the crime, wipe them from the face of his kingdom. Peter, knowing God's forbearance and grace, is reminding the "men of Israel" of their origin story. Do they remember God choosing them? Chasing them down in their disobedience? The "times of refreshing" and the "restoring of all things" has begun, and Peter is inviting God's people in the middle of their ignorance to turn back to Him. The one that would give His One and only Son has begun the new creation project even in the midst of ignorance and rebellion. The message is for us as well. It requires a reckoning with one's own frailty, guilt, and failure. Is there something that you have been holding onto that is keeping you from seeing what God wants to do with your life?

SESSION 8

¹And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, ²greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

⁵On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, ⁶with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” ⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹²And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we





must be saved.”

¹³Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. ¹⁵But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, ¹⁶saying, “What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.” ¹⁸So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, ²⁰for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” ²¹And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. ²²For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

INTRODUCTION

What is the reaction to healing, the miraculous, and resurrection? Annoyance. The religious elite were vexed because of a theological controversy. Resurrection is preposterous! It blinded them both to the image of the in-breaking kingdom revealed in this lame man's healing, and it deafened them to the message of Peter, the same message from their prophets.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why were the religious elite annoyed? Read Luke 20:27. This is a theological point. Might there be other “annoyance” involved? Explain.
2. Go back through Acts so far and map out the growth numbers. What is causing this growth?
3. Peter speaks of the lame man’s healing as a good deed. Have you ever been accused of a wrongdoing for doing what you believed was a good deed? Explain.
4. Peter and John are asked by “what power” or “name” they had accomplished the healing. Explain how Acts 4:8-10 answers the question.
5. Peter has been shown to speak the truth, no matter how inflammatory it is. What makes speaking like this difficult for you? What are the risks?

6. What is Peter doing with scripture in Acts 4:11? Identify it specifically and talk about the implications.
7. Peter and John were bold, but not elite. In our culture, is it okay to be “common” and “uneducated”? Explain. How can this same principle help us to live out our faith?
8. What’s the real “problem” the religious elite are trying to squash? What is the remedy they command and how does it point to their failure? Is it what you would expect from the religious leaders?
9. Beating around the bush is a common thing. Have you ever identified a problem that needed to be fixed, because you wanted to avoid stating the deeper problem that was bothering you? Give an example. What was your motive?

THE SPARK OF THE FAITHFUL



Think about it from the religious elite's perspective. They are the ones in control. They are the prevailing culture in one sense. They have used this power to put Jesus of Nazareth to death. Now, they have heard rumblings of sightings of Him. Now there are people who are healing in his "name," declaring he is alive. The elite's power and livelihood are at stake, so they try to silence the movement. Peter "filled with the Holy Spirit" will not be silenced, and his story remains the same. It is faith in Jesus' name that carries all of this power. How often do we fail to act or speak due to fear? Who do we listen to more? The powers of culture or the voice of our King? Make a correction this week. If there is something you are doing (or not doing) out of fear of those around you, pray and ask God for direction.

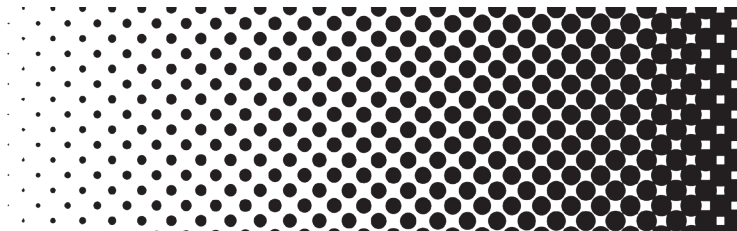
SESSION 9

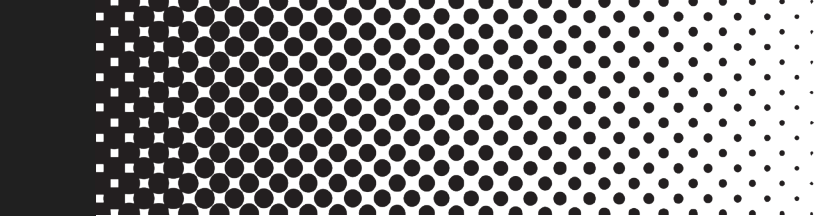
²³When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, ²⁵who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

“ ‘Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?

²⁶The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed’—

²⁷for truly in this city there were gathered together against
your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod





and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. ²⁹And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” ³¹And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

INTRODUCTION

Most of us, when faced with jail and being censured, would respond with anxiety or simply try to escape. Here we see a different picture from the earlier followers of Christ. Prayers. Not just any prayers. Not prayers of revenge. Prayers for boldness to continue the current path. This faith shakes cultural foundations.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Go back and read the reference to Psalm 118:22 that Peter gave last session. How does reading the Psalm further explain the beginning verses of this session? How would you respond to an overnight in jail and a strict warning from your leadership?
2. Now Read Psalm 2. Who is the psalm referring to as those who “rage”? What is the significance of those to whom the believers in Acts 4:23-31 are referring?
3. How often do you “lift your voices together” in prayer? What makes it difficult?
4. In a prayer such as this, what might you ask for?

5. Peter says David said Psalm 2 “by the Holy Spirit.” The doctrine of Inspiration of Scripture has ancient roots. Describe your understanding of Inspiration

6. There have been three occurrences of being “filled with the Holy Spirit” in Acts so far. Find them and compare them. Describe what seems to occur when people are “filled with the Holy Spirit.” Is it what you expected? Do you think it is always accompanied by the miraculous?

7. What does “speaking the word with boldness” mean from your perspective?

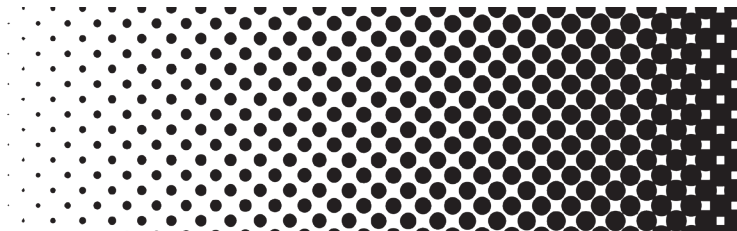
THE SPARK OF THE FAITHFUL



How are we to take the “room shaking” that happens as a result of the faithful prayers of the saints? Is this “shaking” something to set as a goal of prayer? No, but we do know that prayers aligned appropriately with God’s will are answered, sometimes in ways we do not expect. Jesus prayed for deliverance from the “cup” (Luke 22:42) that was before Him, trusting God either way. What he received was strengthening while he was agonizing. Small prayers and large prayers are both good. They are a recognition of, and entrance into the Father’s will. The question to ask is whether our prayers have become neutered by generalization and half-trust? God has proven to shake the world through the death of His Son. Evil has been put on notice. Shouldn’t we pray knowing this is true? How about making your prayers bigger this week, trusting that God is good and faithful?

SESSION 10

³²Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. ³⁶Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.





ACTS 4:32-37

INTRODUCTION

No one needy. Even our culture resonates with this ideal. The early followers lived it out. The importance is understanding who decides if this is a good idea. You or someone else? When the gospel is proclaimed, the resurrection of Jesus spoken, hearts are changed to know that ownership is, in a sense, an illusion. Everything is a gift. A gift worth sharing.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How does Luke want us to understand “one heart and soul”?
2. Describe a context in which you live where you have “everything in common.” Why is it like that? What are limits to living this way?
3. If we said there is a result of the “power” that is spoken of in this text, how would you describe it? Explain.
4. Considering Acts 2, what is the pattern when compared to Acts 3:11 through Acts 4:37? How is the Spirit’s empowerment on display?

5. What are implications of living this way? Do you think it is the same as modern day Socialism? Why/why not?
6. Twice it is stated that money was “laid at the apostles’ feet.” What does this communicate? Do you know of someone whom you would refer to as a “Barnabas” as described by his actions here? Explain.
7. Barnabas is identified with the Levites. Israelite tribal information is rarely noted in the book of Acts. Give your thoughts on why this might be noted here.
8. In Jewish Law, when would land be returned to the original owner? How are the actions in this passage somewhat similar?

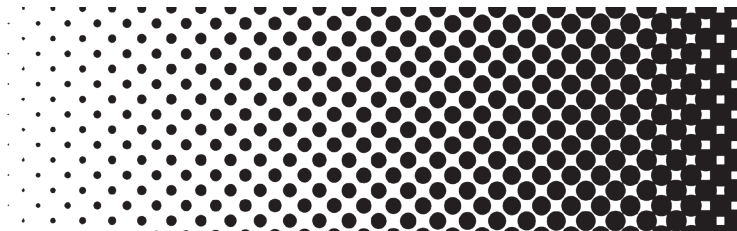
THE SPARK OF THE FAITHFUL

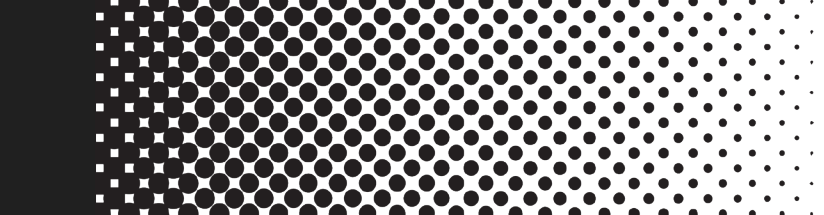


When reading this text, it is hard to believe anyone would say, “Yeah, that sounds awful!” Everyone of one heart and one mind. People selling their possessions to ensure that all are taken care of. No one in need. That said, can you imagine being someone who had a lot of possessions? Imagine being the richest one. In essence this is all presenting a pattern that has already been seen. Jesus, the richest one becoming poor for us. Our salvation cost Him dearly, but nothing would stop Him. Maybe this is what we should remember in our stingiest of moments. What generosity have we been avoiding because we are failing to see what has been lavished upon us through Jesus Christ?

SESSION 11

¹But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ²and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." ⁵When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ⁶The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. ⁷After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." ⁹But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the





door, and they will carry you out.” ¹⁰Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

¹²Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon’s Portico. ¹³None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

INTRODUCTION

With all the incredible good that the Holy Spirit has empowered in the book of Acts so far, it now turns to what can happen on the other side of things. What happens when people act like Spirit-led people but in reality are something the opposite. This story gives the reader pause and it should.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the common generosity that has been on display in the Book of Acts so far.
2. What are the first deaths in Acts caused by? How could this story be used negatively toward God? Explain.
3. To whom are Ananias and Sapphira supposed to be contrasted? What would you say is the issue at the center of this narrative? Why is it here?
4. Read Joshua 7:1, 10-12, 19-21. How does the story of Achan compare to the story of Ananias and Sapphira? What are the implications on others in both stories?
5. While God's disposition towards evil stays the same, why would this Annanias and Sapphira episode be important at this stage in Acts?

6. Read Leviticus 10:1-3. Compare the imagery and offense to Ananias and Sapphira.
7. Have you ever thought about this story when you were dealing with a personal financial matter? Were you a little worried? Explain.
8. We have seen people “filled with the Holy Spirit” so far in Acts. Describe the different “filling” here in Acts 5:3 and discuss where it has echoed through scripture.
9. Esteemed but not joined. Have you ever done this—appreciated someone for what they are doing from a distance, but afraid or otherwise conditioned not to join them? Explain.
10. “Signs and wonders are at the core of Acts 5:12-16. What is being communicated by Peter and the apostles being a part of the miraculous? What has Peter said in Acts that explains this power?”

THE SPARK OF THE FAITHFUL



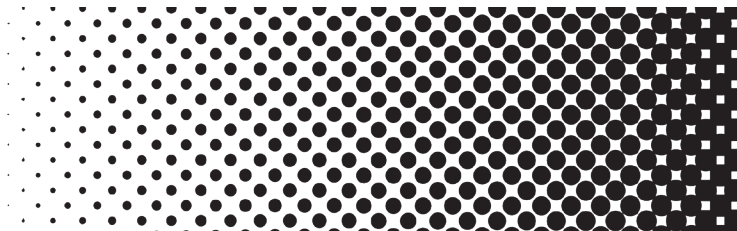
Sin leads to death. But in Ananias and Sapphira we see it in realtime. It depicts what is not a simple progression like James when he says, “...desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (James 1:15). We have been seeing the power of the Holy Spirit expressed in the followers of Jesus in so many ways. Gospel-proclamation, healing, protection, and generosity. Should we not assume that the power of God would not operate proactively? This leads to a simple question to think about this week. Are you taking your sin seriously? Do you have someone who can help you see your sin?

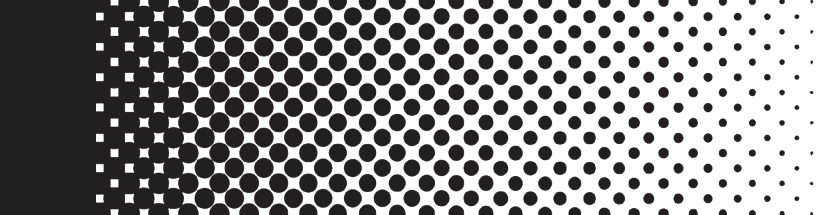
SESSION 12

¹⁷But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy ¹⁸they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. ¹⁹But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ²⁰“Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.” ²¹And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.

Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. ²²But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, ²³“We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.” ²⁴Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. ²⁵And someone came and told them, “Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.” ²⁶Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

²⁷And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” ²⁹But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰The God of our fathers raised Jesus,





whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³²And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

³³When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. ³⁴But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. ³⁵And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. ³⁶For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. ³⁷After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. ³⁸So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; ³⁹but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” So they took his advice, ⁴⁰and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. ⁴²And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

INTRODUCTION

There is a pattern to following Jesus and it is coming to light here. People in power do not respond well to the implications of His kingdom. Maybe they don't understand, or maybe they do but don't like the implications. Either way, this will not be the last imprisonment in the Book of Acts.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What crime was committed that caused the arrest? Why did the arrests happen?
2. Compare this arrest account with Mark 14:53-64.
3. How does this angel of the Lord interact with the situation? What does the angel accomplish? Discuss the implications of such an interaction with an angel in Acts. What might it say about our world today?
4. Peter and James were imprisoned once already. How does this situation compare? Identify the progression.

5. What do you think “all the words of this life” refers to? What have the apostles been speaking and what is the angel telling them to continue?
6. What does the statement in Acts 5:32 teach us about the Holy Spirit? Have you heard explanations of the Holy Spirit that contradict this verse? Explain.
7. What is the message of Gamaliel and how does it influence the treatment of the apostles? Are there other reasons why Gamaliel is introduced? Read Acts 22:3.
8. Acts 5:43 is incredible. Suffering for the name of Jesus is something to rejoice about. What is your response to this? What is the biggest obstacle to this kind of rejoicing?

THE SPARK OF THE FAITHFUL



Nothing is stopping the proclamation of the apostles. People are trying to stop them, but to no avail. Interestingly enough, a Pharisee who believes in the sovereignty and power of God gives a wise suggestion—you aren't gonna stop God and you definitely don't want to be found opposing Him. Ironically, Peter has been explaining that they already have been opposing God, most clearly displayed in the unjust crucifixion of Jesus. Sometimes the forces of culture are strong. Sometimes we can agree to an extent. How can you discern if a cultural idea is good or points in the right direction? Have you ever leaned too much into an idea or ideal that is coming from culture rather than scripture? What is something that is cultural that has somehow integrated with your belief system for wrong reasons?



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