

How to Read the Bible for All its Worth

Lesson 6b: Acts 3-5 – Early Events in the Church

Introduction

Once the church was established and began to grow, it was hard to hide the fact that a number of people in Jerusalem were listening to their preaching. The existing Jewish establishment began to resist the church and thus we will see the beginning of the early persecution of the church.

Acts 3:1-10 – The Healing of the Lame Man

Why did the Lord give the Apostles in the early church the ability to heal?

It served as proof of their message.

What was the nature of this man's infirmity? Did he just have a broken leg or was it more serious?

He had been completely lame since birth and unable to walk his entire life. He not only couldn't walk, but didn't know how to walk – it is something we must learn.

What is the difference between this healing and the ones claimed by “miracle healers” in the world?

This healing was done in a public place – not a controlled setting. This healing involved transformation of damaged human flesh into healed flesh. Everyone knew this man was lame and had probably seen him begging for years. It wasn't a set-up.

Acts 3:11-26 – Peter's Message to the crowd

To whom did Peter attribute the ability to heal this man? How is this relevant to us today? Why is this the perfect way to begin the sermon he is about to preach?

Peter attributed the ability to heal to Christ and in no way took any credit for the ability. This is so relevant today because it is a source of confidence that we can also be used by the Lord to accomplish great things for Him. It is the perfect beginning to a sermon because Peter draws their attention to Christ, who is the object of faith for salvation.

Where did Peter place the blame for Christ's death?

Peter placed the blame for Christ's death upon their shoulders because Pilate was willing to release Him but they decided to have a murderer to be released instead of Christ.

What does it mean in verse 26 when it says, “Unto you first...”? Also see Rom. 1:16 & Acts 18:5-6.

God gave first priority to the Jews when the gospel would come into a city. However, most of them rejected the message and God sent the evangelist onto the Gentiles. God gave them this priority because of the faith of their fathers. This applies to us and our children today. If they won't listen, God will go to someone else!

Acts 4:1-22 – Peter and John's Arrest and Interrogation

Why did the chief priests, Pharisees and Sadducees feel so threatened by their preaching?

They were in power and didn't want to lose their grip or control on the Jews.

What does verse 11 mean, “This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders...”

The Israelites had rejected Christ, but God used Him to begin a new building (people) through the church.

Does Peter allow for any other means of salvation besides Christ?

No. He proclaimed that salvation is only through Jesus Christ.

What astonishes the interrogators about Peter and John?

They had such boldness about them despite their lack of formal education.

When told not to preach Jesus anymore, what is Peter and John's response? How is it significant to us today in our situation?

It is more important to obey God, who had commissioned them to preach Jesus, instead of men. We must keep this in mind as we face restrictions placed upon us by our government, schools, media, etc... We have an obligation to speak of Christ!

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Acts 4:23-31 – *The Church's Growth in the Face of Adversity*

What was the request made of the Lord in response to the events that took place and why did they make that request?

They prayed for boldness because they were just persecuted and they probably realized that worse persecution was just down the road. They knew they needed supernatural help to be able to overcome.

Why would this be a request that the Lord would be willing to grant?

It furthered the Lord's cause and commission that He gave them. It was in line with the Lord's will!

What does it mean to be, "filled with the Holy Spirit"? How was this an answer to their prayer?

Being filled with the Holy Spirit means to be completely yielded to the Holy Ghost and allowing Him to direct your thoughts, words, and actions. God gave them the grace to yield themselves, thereby obtaining the supernatural courage and strength they needed.

Acts 4:37-5:11 – *Early Church Discipline: The Death of Ananias and Sapphira*

Deuteronomy 23:21-22 – "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee."

What was the church doing that was such a radical step on the part of the members?

People were selling their possessions and sharing the proceeds with the church.

What was Ananias' and Sapphira's sin? Why would they have done this?

Ananias and Sapphira's sin was selling land and implying that they were giving the full sum to the church, while they secretly kept money for themselves. They probably did this to look good and holy in the eyes of their fellow church members.

How was it that they lied to God? See 1 Thessalonians 4:8.

The church is the bride of Christ and by lying to the church, they were lying before God. The church is a divine institution and Christ's body while here on earth. By saying they were giving all the money to the church, they made a vow to God, which they didn't keep.

Why did the Lord exact so great a punishment upon them? See Deuteronomy 13:6-11

This is the first example of church discipline in the Scriptures. The Lord acts as judge, jury, and executioner for this sin. By doing this, the Lord really brought people to respect the importance or purity in the church.

What does this example teach us today concerning sin in the church and the importance of exercising loving church discipline?

God, who is unchanging, still hates sin and especially despises sin within the church. It is of utmost importance that we seek to maintain the purity of the body!

Acts 5:12-42 – *The Arrest of the Apostles and the Reaction of the Jewish Leaders*

When the apostles were arrested the second time, why did the angel release them?

The angel released them to demonstrate to God's people that He would not allow this movement to be squelched. He also used it to demonstrate to the chief priests and rulers that they could not stop this movement of God.

What punishment was ultimately inflicted upon them by the chief priests and rulers?

They were imprisoned, interrogated, and ultimately beaten before being released and commanded not to preach in the name of Jesus Christ any longer.

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What was the apostle's reaction to the punishment and what do we learn from this?

The apostles took the beating, rejoiced in that they were able to suffer for Christ's sake, and continued to teach and preach Jesus. There is a significant lesson for us today concerning persecution. It will happen to all of us in some form, whether it is being snubbed by those who don't want to hear our message, ridicule, or possibly even some form of physical persecution. We should recognize this as being part of serving Christ and rejoice that we have been counted worthy to suffer for His sake.

Assignments:

Read Acts 6:1 – 7:60 and answer the following questions:

1. What motivated the apostles to have deacons ordained?
2. What were the qualifications of a deacon?
3. What did the Jews have to do in order to bring charges against Stephen?
4. Why does Stephen recount the history of the nation of Israel? (Note: This is a good summary of Israel's early history. It is worth taking your time to read and understand.)
5. What spiritual points does Stephen try to make with this message (see vss. 37, 48-50, and 51-53)?
6. What put the Jews over the edge in their rage against Stephen?
7. Of the things Stephen said and did while being stoned, what most impresses you?