

LESSON 4: ACTS 3-7
MARCH 16, 2016

OVERVIEW

- . The power to heal the body and the soul – Acts 3:1 - 4:4
- . The power to meet persecution from without – Acts 4:4 – 4:37
- . The power to meet the peril within – Acts 5:1-16
- . The power to rejoice when persecution intensifies – Acts 5:17-5:42
- . Producing new leadership – Acts 6

THE POWER TO HEAL THE BODY AND THE SOUL – ACTS 3:1 – 4:4

- . Healing – God’s sign of authority given to the early church
 - . Many wonders and miraculous signs done by the apostles – Acts 2:43
 - . God gave the apostles many signs of unique authority, including special power to heal several diseases in a spectacular way
 - . As Christians reached a spiritual maturity indicated in later epistles like Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, these gifts are no longer even mentioned
- . Peter heals a beggar outside the church
 - . This beggar was a regular at the temple that people knew
 - . Jesus probably walked past this beggar on a number of occasions
- . Physical healing pointing to spiritual healing
 - . As the cripple began to stand and walk, that was not enough
 - . He shouted for joy praising God and telling everyone what God had done
 - . Peter’s miracles quickly drew a crowd to the area
 - . Many people were familiar with the cripple because he was a fixture
 - . Peter took advantage of the moment to preach the gospel
 - . Following this message many people began to believe
 - . The number of men grew to about 5000 – Acts 4:4
- . Persecution followed
 - . Not only were Peter and John imprisoned but the beggar as well
 - . The beggar chose to stand with Peter and John at their trial
 - . This persecution resulted in the gospel being preached now to the leaders of the nation

THE POWER TO MEET PERSECUTION FROM WITHOUT – ACTS 4:5-37

- . Power to witness to the Sanhedrin – Acts 4:5-22
 - . Peter and John were seized by the Sadducees for proclaiming that Jesus had risen from the dead
 - . The next day they were brought before the elders and the teachers of the law, whose outward power appeared to be great
 - . Yet God had disowned them
 - . Their threats and commands were therefore powerless to thwart the fulfillment of God's purpose
- . Peter's extraordinary fearlessness as well as complete assurance, dignified demeanor and wise utterances astounded the rulers
 - . They knew these men as simple, unlearned fishermen
 - . They knew these men had been with Jesus
- . The Sanhedrin realized there was nothing they could do about the obviously transformed men, so they tried threats
 - . So the rulers threatened them again then set them free
- . After the meeting, a group of believers gathered, united in prayer and found further strength to continue
 - . They prayed to the living, personal God who has all power and authority over flesh
 - . They used the promises and prophecies of scripture as a basis for prayer in the will of God
 - . They didn't pray for protection, rather for boldness, to witness and more power to help others
- . God answered their prayer by almost a second Pentecost, with a violent earthquake and a new infilling of the Holy Spirit that resulted in mutual love and intimate fellowship among themselves

THE POWER TO MEET THE PERIL WITHIN – ACTS 5:1-16

- . Ananias and Sapphira were part of the small young flock of believers
 - . Yet, as the story goes, they appeared to be weeds sown amongst the wheat
 - . Outwardly, they appeared to be true grain until the powerful judgment of God fell upon them
 - . They sold their land, outwardly trying to show their willingness to share their possessions
 - . However, they conspired to hold back some of their proceeds for themselves

- . Peter confronts Ananias and Sapphira looking for the truth
 - . First, Peter confronts Ananias who lies about what he did
 - . No sooner does he lie that God strikes him down
 - . Then Sapphira is brought in and questioned and she also chooses to lie and God strikes her down
- . This story shows us the power of the Holy Spirit to police its own
 - . Wherever the Holy Spirit manifests is power there is always hatred of sin and every false way
 - . This drastic purging by God of deception from the early church actually consolidated it further
 - . The united front of believers in true holiness resulted in added power and kept out mere professors

THE POWER TO REJOICE WHEN PERSECUTION INTENSIFIES – ACTS 5:17-42

- . The apostles are arrested for their preaching
 - . The leaders of the church were filled with both jealousy and fear
 - . Didn't like the apostles talking about Jesus and His rising from the dead
 - . The apostles are arrested and put in jail to await trial before Sanhedrin
 - . During the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail setting them free
- . The apostles return to the temple to continue teaching
 - . The next day when the rulers come to get them they discover they are gone
 - . They were alarmed at how they could escape
 - . They go to the temple and find the apostles are back at it again
- . Sanhedrin don't know how to deal with the apostles
 - . They bring them before them and want to convict them
 - . A wise Pharisee named Gamaliel convinces them otherwise
 - . He talks about start up movements that have come before them and died
 - . He says that if this is not of God it will also die
 - . If it is of God and they persecute them then they will get sideways with God
- . Sanhedrin decide to release the apostles after flogging them
 - . The Sanhedrin give them strong orders to stop their preaching, or else
 - . Instead of fearing the Sanhedrin, they are empowered by the Spirit and continue their preaching and teaching in the temple courts

PRODUCING NEW LEADERSHIP – ACTS 6 - 7

- . The pressure of a tense situation and its dangers – Acts 6:1
 - . A period of time has elapsed from the end of Chapter 5 and Chapter 6
 - . During this period, the new sect of Jewish believers in Jesus Christ had grown into a multitude of people
 - . Two such sects were the Hebraic (Aramaic speakers) and the Grecian Jews (or Hellenists)
 - . A rift arose as to how they should care for the poor amongst them
 - . Up until now every issue involving the church had to be reviewed by the apostles
 - . The demand on their time was becoming too great and it was taking them away from their preaching and teaching
 - . It was decided that they would appoint seven people to become leaders, or deacons, and these people would deal with the day to day issues of the church
 - . This allowed the apostles to spend all their time praying and preach
- . Stephan, a man full of God's grace and power, performs great wonders and signs among the people – Acts 6:8
 - . Opposition arose that could not match the wisdom afforded Stephen by the Spirit
 - . The opposition drew up false charges of blasphemy and brought him before the Sanhedrin to be tried
 - . Stephen delivers his amazing, articulate testimony before the Sanhedrin taking the group through the history of God's relationship with His people
 - . Stephen accuses the Sanhedrin of killing the Messiah which resulted in a furry and gnashing of teeth
 - . Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up and saw the heavens open and the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Father
 - . The members of the Sanhedrin rushed at him and began stoning him
 - . Stephen, as he was dying prayed for his tormentors asking God to forgive their ignorance
 - . As Stephen lay dying, Saul looked on approvingly
 - . Stephen becomes the first Christian martyr

NEXT LESSON, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6, 2016: ACTS 8:1-9:30