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THE SON HAS RISEN

COMMENTARY



theGOSPELPROJECT.

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GOD'S WORD FOR YOU

A SUMMARY OF THE BIBLE

In the beginning, the all-powerful, personal God created the universe. This God created human beings in His image to live joyfully in His presence, in humble submission to His gracious authority. But all of us have rebelled against God and, in consequence, must suffer the punishment of our rebellion: physical death and the wrath of God.

Thankfully, God initiated a rescue plan, which began with His choosing the nation of Israel to display His glory in a fallen world. The Bible describes how God acted mightily on Israel's behalf, rescuing His people from slavery and then giving them His holy law. But God's people—like all of us—failed to rightly reflect the glory of God.

Then, in the fullness of time, in the person of Jesus Christ, God Himself came to renew the world and to restore His people. Jesus perfectly obeyed the law given to Israel. Though innocent, He suffered the consequences of human rebellion by His death on a cross. But three days later, God raised Him from the dead.

Now the church of Jesus Christ has been commissioned by God to take the news of Christ's work to the world. Empowered by God's Spirit, the church calls all people everywhere to repent of sin and to trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness. By God's grace in Christ, repentance and faith restores our relationship with God and results in a life of ongoing transformation.

The Bible promises that Jesus Christ will return to this earth as the conquering King. Only those who live in repentant faith in Christ will escape God's judgment and live joyfully in God's presence for all eternity. God's message is the same to all of us: repent and believe, before it is too late. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe with your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and you will be saved.

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THE EDITOR

We have reached the climax, the main event of the story. Throughout Scripture, we have seen humanity's rebellion—our selfishness, our tendency to be swayed toward other gods. Yet time and time again, God forgave and relented and showed Himself consistently faithful to His people despite our unfaithfulness. He even provided a sacrificial system so that humanity's sins could be atoned for, forgiven, and wiped clean. But our sinful ways continued and there was no sure way that we would or could remain faithful.

God knew that. God knew of our weakness, our idleness, our tendency to give in to temptation. But He already had a plan in motion. A plan for His Son to be the final sacrifice.

Jesus came on the scene, fulfilling every messianic prophecy. We have been waiting for this moment since Genesis 3:15, where God cursed the serpent and told him, "He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." Jesus fulfilled this. He allowed Himself to be crucified. But then He rose again, having the ultimate victory over sin, Satan, and death. He ascended to heaven after commissioning His disciples to continue the mission to share the gospel and grow the kingdom of God.

This is good news! Jesus died and rose again for us to be forgiven and gain salvation that we may be adopted into His family. He sealed it with the Holy Spirit, whom He sent to empower believers. He has equipped us with all we need to obey Him and live as kingdom people until His return. May we be faithful to Christ as He is faithful to us! To God be the glory!

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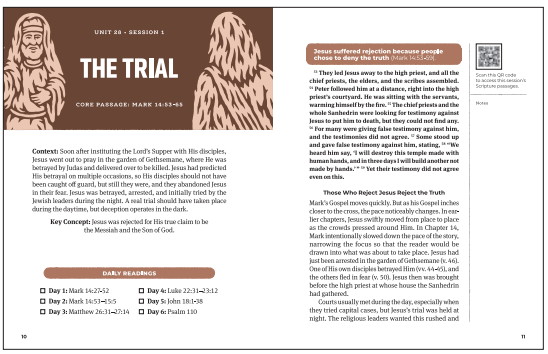
HOW TO USE THE COMMENTARY

The Commentary is a vital tool in your personal and group experience with The Gospel Project for Adults. Here are different ways on how to make the most of your time with it:

1) AS A SUPPLEMENT TO THE LEADER GUIDE


UNIT 2B - SESSION 1

THE TRIAL

CORE PASSAGE: MARK 14:53–65

Context: Soon after instituting the Lord's Supper with His disciples, Jesus went out to pray in the garden of Gethsemane, where He was betrayed by Judas and delivered over to be killed. Jesus had predicted His betrayal on multiple occasions, so His disciples should not have been caught off guard, but still they were, and they abandoned Jesus in their fear. Jesus was betrayed, arrested, and initially tried by the Jewish leaders during the night. A real trial should have taken place during the daytime, but deception operates in the dark.

Key Concept: Jesus was rejected for His true claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God.

DAILY READINGS

- **Day 1:** Mark 14:27-52
- **Day 2:** Mark 14:53–15:5
- **Day 3:** Matthew 26:31–27:14
- **Day 4:** Luke 22:31–23:12
- **Day 5:** John 18:1-38
- **Day 6:** Psalm 110

10

Jesus suffered rejection because people chose to deny the truth [Mark 14:53-65]

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

53 They led Jesus away to the high priest, and all the
chief priests, the elders, and the scribes assembled.
54 Peter followed him at a distance, right into the high
priest's courtyard. He was sitting with the servants,
warming himself by the fire. 55 The chief priests and the
whole Sanhedrin were looking for testimony against
Jesus to put him to death, but they could not find any.
56 For many were giving false testimony against him,
and the testimonies did not agree. 57 Some stood up
and gave false testimony against him, stating, 58 "We
heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with
human hands, and in three days I will build another not
made by hands.'" 59 Yet their testimony did not agree
even on this.

Those Who Reject Jesus Reject the Truth

Mark's Gospel moves quickly. But as his Gospel inches closer to the cross, the pace noticeably changes. In earlier chapters, Jesus swiftly moved from place to place as the crowds pressed around Him. In Chapter 14, Mark intentionally slowed down the pace of the story, narrowing the focus so that the reader would be drawn into what was about to take place. Jesus had just been arrested in the garden of Gethsemane (v. 46). One of His own disciples betrayed Him (vv. 44-45), and the others fled in fear (v. 50). Jesus then was brought before the high priest at whose house the Sanhedrin had gathered.

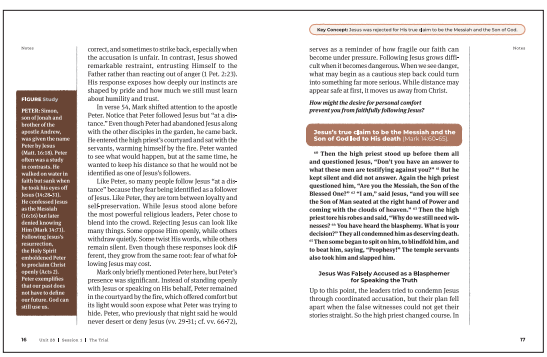
Courts usually met during the day, especially when they tried capital cases, but Jesus's trial was held at night. The religious leaders wanted this rushed and

11

The Leader Guide takes you through the same Personal Preparation your group members will follow in their Personal Study Guide so you can experience that with them during the week. And then the Leader Guide provides you with step-by-step instructions for the weekly Group Experience, including the learning activity and application questions.

You can use the Commentary to supplement your learning and personal preparation. The context, key concept, and daily readings as well as the Scripture breakdowns and discussion questions in the Commentary will be the same as in the Personal Study Guide and the Leader Guide. But the bulk of the content is unique, so read through the Commentary to gain additional insight for your group's questions and discussions during the Group Experience.

2) AS A PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE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correct, and sometimes to strike back, especially when the accusation is unfair. In contrast, Jesus showed remarkable restraint, entrusting Himself to the Father rather than reacting out of anger (1 Pet. 2:23). His response exposes how deeply our instincts are shaped by pride and how much we still must learn about humility and trust.

In verse 54, Mark shifted attention to the apostle Peter. Notice that Peter followed Jesus but "at a distance." Even though Peter had abandoned Jesus along with the other disciples in the garden, he came back. He entered the high priest's courtyard and sat with the servants, warming himself by the fire. Peter wanted to see what would happen, but at the same time, he wanted to keep his distance so that he would not be identified as one of Jesus's followers.

Like Peter, so many people follow Jesus "at a distance" because they fear being identified as a follower of Jesus. Like Peter, they are torn between loyalty and self-preservation. While Jesus stood alone before the most powerful religious leaders, Peter chose to blend into the crowd. Rejecting Jesus can look like many things. Some oppose Him openly, while others withdraw quietly. Some twist His words, while others remain silent. Even though these responses look different, they grow from the same root: fear of what following Jesus may cost.

Mark only briefly mentioned Peter here, but Peter's presence was significant. Instead of standing openly with Jesus or speaking on His behalf, Peter remained in the courtyard by the fire, which offered comfort but its light would soon expose what Peter was trying to hide. Peter, who previously that night said he would never desert or deny Jesus (vv. 29-31; cf. vv. 66-72),

PEOPLE Study

PETER: Simon, son of Jonah and brother of the apostle Andrew, was given the name Peter by Jesus (Matt. 16:18). Peter often was a study in contrasts. He walked on water in faith but sank when he took his eyes off Jesus (14:28-31). He confessed Jesus as the Messiah (16:16) but later denied knowing Him (Mark 14:71). Following Jesus's resurrection, the Holy Spirit emboldened Peter to proclaim Christ openly (Acts 2). Peter exemplifies that our past does not have to define our future. God can still use us.

16 Unit 2A | Session 1 | The Trial

Key Concept: Jesus was rejected for His true claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God.

serves as a reminder of how fragile our faith can become under pressure. Following Jesus grows difficult when it becomes dangerous. When we see danger, what may begin as a cautious step back could turn into something far more serious. While distance may appear safe at first, it moves us away from Christ.

How might the desire for personal comfort prevent you from faithfully following Jesus?

Jesus's true claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God led to His death [Mark 14:53-65]

60 Then the high priest stood up before them all
and questioned Jesus, "Don't you have an answer to
what these men are testifying against you?" 61 But he
kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest
questioned him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the
Blessed One?" 62 "I am," said Jesus, "and you will see
the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and
coming with the clouds of heaven." 63 Then the high
priest tore his robes and said, "Why do we still need wit-
nesses? 64 You have heard the blasphemy. What is your
decision?" They all condemned him as deserving death.
65 Then some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and
to beat him, saying, "Prophesy!" The temple servants
also took him and slapped him.

Jesus Was Falsely Accused as a Blasphemer for Speaking the Truth

Up to this point, the leaders tried to condemn Jesus through coordinated accusation, but their plan fell apart when the false witnesses could not get their stories straight. So the high priest changed course. In

Notes

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Your leader and your group may want to use the Commentary as a personal study guide for a more in-depth study of the Scripture passages in the sessions provided. Your group may be more knowledgeable and seasoned and may want to delve deeper into the nuances of Scripture as you explore how Scripture points to Christ throughout the Bible.

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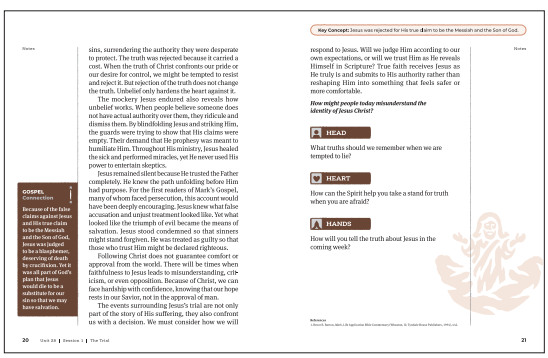
Leaders may also choose to use the Commentary as a personal study guide for their group because it is easier to read with a larger font than the Personal Study Guide.

If used in this way, the Commentary is designed to be used before the group time and then during the group time. Read through the session to be prepared for your group time. The context, key concept, and daily readings will give you the background and focus you need to study. The various headings and subheadings give you the bullet points that connect to the key concept. Answer the questions provided to prepare beforehand to discuss during the group time together. The Head, Heart, and Hands questions help you apply what you have learned. Use the margins for whatever notes you might need to jot down.

3) AS A LEADER GUIDE


Notes

sins, surrendering the authority they were desperate to protect. The truth was rejected because it carried a cost. When the truth of Christ confronts our pride or our desire for control, we might be tempted to resist and reject it. But rejection of the truth does not change the truth. Unbelief only hardens the heart against it.

The mockery Jesus endured also reveals how unbelief works. When people believe someone does not have actual authority over them, they ridicule and dismiss them. By blindfolding Jesus and striking Him, the guards were trying to show that His claims were empty. Their demand that He prophesy was meant to humiliate Him. Throughout His ministry, Jesus healed the sick and performed miracles, yet He never used His power to entertain skeptics.

Jesus remained silent because He trusted the Father completely. He knew the path unfolding before Him had purpose. For the first readers of Mark's Gospel, many of whom faced persecution, this account would have been deeply encouraging. Jesus knew what false accusation and unjust treatment looked like. Yet what looked like the triumph of evil became the means of salvation. Jesus stood condemned so that sinners might stand forgiven. He was treated as guilty so that those who trust Him might be declared righteous.

Following Christ does not guarantee comfort or approval from the world. There will be times when faithfulness to Jesus leads to misunderstanding, criticism, or even opposition. Because of Christ, we can face hardship with confidence, knowing that our hope rests in our Savior, not in the approval of man.

The events surrounding Jesus's trial are not only part of the story of His suffering, they also confront us with a decision. We must consider how we will

GOSPEL Connection

Because of the false claims against Jesus and His true claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God, Jesus was judged to be a blasphemer, deserving of death by crucifixion. Yet it was all part of God's plan that Jesus would die to be a substitute for our sin so that we may have salvation.

Key Concept: Jesus was rejected for His true claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God.

Notes

respond to Jesus. Will we judge Him according to our own expectations, or will we trust Him as He reveals Himself in Scripture? True faith receives Jesus as He truly is and submits to His authority rather than reshaping Him into something that feels safer or more comfortable.

How might people today misunderstand the identity of Jesus Christ?

HEAD

What truths should we remember when we are tempted to lie?

HEART

How can the Spirit help you take a stand for truth when you are afraid?

HANDS

How will you tell the truth about Jesus in the coming week?

If your group chooses to use the Commentary as their personal study guide, then you as the leader can also use the Commentary as a leader guide. For the best learning experience, having the Leader Guide along with the Commentary will be beneficial as the Leader Guide has a guided path to lead the group time, a group activity to foster discussion and group interaction, and further details about the Head, Heart, and Hands application section.

But if you choose not to use the Leader Guide, you can use the Commentary as a leader guide by following the pages in order with your group, highlighting important ideas and concepts along with the headings and subheadings to add further insight to the key concept. Ask your group what was interesting to them, and use the questions provided to further your group discussion. And as you wrap up with the Head, Heart, and Hands questions, allow the group to discuss how to apply what they've learned. End with prayer requests and praises that you can jot down in the margins.

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UNIT 28
THE FINAL DAYS

MATTHEW; MARK; JOHN

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Memory Verses

"Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and
look at my hands. Reach out your hand and
put it into my side. Don't be faithless, but believe.'
Thomas responded to him, 'My Lord and my God!'
Jesus said, 'Because you have seen me,
you have believed. Blessed are
those who have not seen and yet believe.'"

—John 20:27-29

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UNIT 28 • SESSION 1

THE TRIAL

CORE PASSAGE: MARK 14:53-65



Context: Soon after instituting the Lord's Supper with His disciples, Jesus went out to pray in the garden of Gethsemane, where He was betrayed by Judas and delivered over to be killed. Jesus had predicted His betrayal on multiple occasions, so His disciples should not have been caught off guard, but still they were, and they abandoned Jesus in their fear. Jesus was betrayed, arrested, and initially tried by the Jewish leaders during the night. A real trial should have taken place during the daytime, but deception operates in the dark.

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- ☐ **Day 1:** Mark 14:27-52
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- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 110

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Jesus suffered rejection because people chose to deny the truth (Mark 14:53-59).

53 They led Jesus away to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes assembled. 54 Peter followed him at a distance, right into the high priest's courtyard. He was sitting with the servants, warming himself by the fire. 55 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they could not find any. 56 For many were giving false testimony against him, and the testimonies did not agree. 57 Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, stating, 58 "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with human hands, and in three days I will build another not made by hands.'" 59 Yet their testimony did not agree even on this.

Those Who Reject Jesus Reject the Truth

Mark's Gospel moves quickly. But as his Gospel inches closer to the cross, the pace noticeably changes. In earlier chapters, Jesus swiftly moved from place to place as the crowds pressed around Him. In Chapter 14, Mark intentionally slowed down the pace of the story, narrowing the focus so that the reader would be drawn into what was about to take place. Jesus had just been arrested in the garden of Gethsemane (v. 46). One of His own disciples betrayed Him (vv. 44-45), and the others fled in fear (v. 50). Jesus then was brought before the high priest at whose house the Sanhedrin had gathered.

Courts usually met during the day, especially when they tried capital cases, but Jesus's trial was held at night. The religious leaders wanted this rushed and

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

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Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to learn more about the key figures in Jesus's trial.

secretive trial resolved quickly so that Jesus could be sentenced before morning. In this way, Mark made it clear that this was not a fair trial. The religious leaders were not seeking the truth but looking for a way to justify a decision they had already made in their minds: Jesus had to die. Their difficulty wasn't in deciding what they thought needed to be done but in finding a charge that could be made to sound lawful.

The Sanhedrin was the highest religious court in Israel, composed of seventy men: the chief priests, elders, scribes, as well as the high priest. These men were tasked with guarding God's law and protecting justice. Yet Mark made it clear that justice was not their goal. Mark said the council members were "looking for testimony against Jesus" (v. 55). They were not listening carefully to find out what was the truth. In fact, they were actively searching for anything that would allow them to kill Him. Instead of truth leading to a verdict, the verdict was predetermined, and the truth would be forced to follow.

Several witnesses came forward and spoke against Jesus, but their testimonies contradicted one another. These contradictions should have ended the trial immediately. According to God's law, a person could not be condemned to death unless at least two to three witnesses agreed on the charges (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Num. 35:30). Even knowing this, the Sanhedrin pressed on, showing how far they were willing to go to kill Jesus. They dismissed the truth when it was inconvenient and embraced lies. Faithfulness to God's law was not the aim—removing Jesus was.

Why is there wisdom in requiring multiple witnesses before passing judgment?

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Several witnesses came forward with accusations that sounded serious on the surface, yet their testimony was both confused and distorted. They claimed that Jesus said He would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, presenting His words as a dangerous threat against one of the most sacred institutions in Israel. In a setting where the temple stood at the center of religious, social, and national life, such a charge would have carried enormous weight. It made Jesus appear not only reckless but subversive.

Yet when we look back at what Jesus actually said, the picture becomes much clearer. In John 2:19-21, Jesus declared, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days." John immediately explained that Jesus "was speaking about the temple of his body." The statement was not a threat against the physical structure in Jerusalem but a prophetic word about His coming death and resurrection. The misunderstanding, whether intentional or not, turned a promise of redemption into an declaration of destruction.

This distortion also reflected a deeper spiritual blindness. The religious leaders and witnesses thought in purely physical categories. To them, the temple meant stone, courts, sacrifices, and national identity. But Jesus pointed beyond the building to something greater. The temple had always been the place where God's presence dwelled among His people. By referring to His body as the temple, Jesus was claiming that He Himself is the true meeting place between God and humanity. What the temple symbolized, He embodied.

Even passages such as Mark 13:1-2, where Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple, were not calls to violence but announcements of divine judgment and transition. The physical temple would fall, not

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because Jesus would tear it down but because God's redemptive plan was being fulfilled. The old system with its sacrifices and priesthood was giving way to something greater.

Jesus's words, though, were torn from their context and reshaped into something sinister to make Him appear threatening. That same pattern has not disappeared. When people resist Jesus, they often do not begin with open denial. Often Jesus's truth claims are softened, narrowed, or redirected until they no longer confront the heart. What He says about sin becomes a call to self-improvement. What He says about repentance becomes a vague invitation to "do better." What He says about lordship is reduced to helpful advice. In this way, Jesus's words are not rejected on the surface, but they are emptied of their true meaning.

This kind of response reveals something deeper than misunderstanding. It shows a reluctance to submit to the authority of Christ that He proclaimed. Left to ourselves, we prefer a version of Jesus who affirms rather than confronts, who comforts without calling us to change. Yet the real Jesus cannot be reshaped without being lost. His words carry both grace and truth, both invitation and demand. To hear Him rightly requires more than agreement with certain ideas. It requires a willingness to receive Him on His terms, even when His words challenge what we would rather hold onto.

Voices from THE CHURCH

"Popular culture and modern thought still view Christ's claims as blasphemous, and if we express our faith, people will view us as bigoted and intolerant. They will be outraged by our claims to know the truth. Our belief that God controls our life violates their desire to have a human-centered life. . . . Be ready for the world to be morally outraged at your single-minded belief in Christ and his truth."[1]
–Bruce B. Barton

Those Who Reject Jesus Invent False Claims About Him

Again, Mark returned to the same problem. The testimony of the witnesses did not agree. Their accusations and lies contradicted one another. In verse 59,

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we are told again that "their testimony did not agree." Mark intentionally used repetition to emphasize to the reader how baseless these charges truly were. The religious leaders should have recognized what was going on, but that evidence stood in the way of what they wanted, and so, they chose to ignore it.

What Mark made clear here is that rejecting Jesus is rarely the result of missing information. These religious leaders had heard His teaching and witnessed His deity on display. They had witnessed His power with their own eyes. Knowledge was not the problem. Their problem was unbelief. Once the heart is set against God and embraces unbelief, even the clearest evidence struggles to persuade.

During this exchange, Jesus remained silent. He did not challenge the testimony of the witnesses nor attempt to correct their accusations. Jesus offered no defense. Why didn't Jesus say anything? Did this point to Him being weak? Certainly not! His silence did not mean weakness. Jesus knew they were not seeking the truth, and He understood that no answer would change their minds.

It's in this silence that Scripture was fulfilled. Roughly seven hundred years before this night, the prophet Isaiah spoke of a Servant who would suffer silently, like a lamb led to the slaughter. Here, Jesus embodied that promise (Isa. 53:7). By staying silent, Jesus exposed the injustice of the trial. The leaders were left alone with their lies, their authority revealed to be thin and fragile. Faithfulness does not always require words. Sometimes it calls for trusting God enough to remain silent. When we are wronged, our response is often quick, loud, and driven by a desire to set the record straight. We feel the need to justify, to

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correct, and sometimes to strike back, especially when the accusation is unfair. In contrast, Jesus showed remarkable restraint, entrusting Himself to the Father rather than reacting out of anger (1 Pet. 2:23). His response exposes how deeply our instincts are shaped by pride and how much we still must learn about humility and trust.

In verse 54, Mark shifted attention to the apostle Peter. Notice that Peter followed Jesus but "at a distance." Even though Peter had abandoned Jesus along with the other disciples in the garden, he came back. He entered the high priest's courtyard and sat with the servants, warming himself by the fire. Peter wanted to see what would happen, but at the same time, he wanted to keep his distance so that he would not be identified as one of Jesus's followers.

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Mark only briefly mentioned Peter here, but Peter's presence was significant. Instead of standing openly with Jesus or speaking on His behalf, Peter remained in the courtyard by the fire, which offered comfort but its light would soon expose what Peter was trying to hide. Peter, who previously that night said he would never desert or deny Jesus (vv. 29-31; cf. vv. 66-72),

FIGURE Study

PETER: Simon, son of Jonah and brother of the apostle Andrew, was given the name Peter by Jesus (Matt. 16:18). Peter often was a study in contrasts. He walked on water in faith but sank when he took his eyes off Jesus (14:28-31). He confessed Jesus as the Messiah (16:16) but later denied knowing Him (Mark 14:71). Following Jesus's resurrection, the Holy Spirit emboldened Peter to proclaim Christ openly (Acts 2). Peter exemplifies that our past does not have to define our future. God can still use us.

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serves as a reminder of how fragile our faith can become under pressure. Following Jesus grows difficult when it becomes dangerous. When we see danger, what may begin as a cautious step back could turn into something far more serious. While distance may appear safe at first, it moves us away from Christ.

How might the desire for personal comfort prevent you from faithfully following Jesus?

Jesus's true claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God led to His death (Mark 14:60-65).

60 Then the high priest stood up before them all and questioned Jesus, "Don't you have an answer to what these men are testifying against you?" 61 But he kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest questioned him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" 62 "I am," said Jesus, "and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven." 63 Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? 64 You have heard the blasphemy. What is your decision?" They all condemned him as deserving death. 65 Then some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to beat him, saying, "Prophesy!" The temple servants also took him and slapped him.

Jesus Was Falsely Accused as a Blasphemer for Speaking the Truth

Up to this point, the leaders tried to condemn Jesus through coordinated accusation, but their plan fell apart when the false witnesses could not get their stories straight. So the high priest changed course. In

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verse 60, he rose from his seat and addressed Jesus directly. At first, his questions focused on Jesus's silence. Why would He not respond to the accusations brought against Him? Why did He offer no defense? Their false testimony had already exposed itself, and responding to it would only give it attention it did not deserve. Then in verse 61, the high priest asked a question that revealed the true purpose of the trial: "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

The high priest did not ask this question with good intentions. He was not trying to understand or clarify. He already knew what Jesus had claimed throughout His ministry. What he wanted was a clear, public statement that could be used to justify a death sentence. Jesus answered without delay: "I am" (v. 62).

With those words, Jesus openly affirmed His identity as the Messiah and the Son of God. But He did not stop there. He turned their attention to the future. Jesus said they would see the Son of Man—the prophetic name He most often used for Himself—seated at the right hand of God and coming with the clouds of heaven (v. 62). He drew this directly from Scripture, revealing that He shared in God's authority and glory (Dan. 7:13-14; Ps. 110:1). Jesus was not only claiming to be the Messiah, He was claiming divine authority and the prerogative of future judgment. The One who was chained and accused would one day rise above His judges to sit at the right hand of God.

Jesus knew exactly how these words would be received. He knew they would seal His fate. Still, He spoke. Jesus did not speak to preserve His life but to bear witness to the truth. Faithfulness, not self-preservation, determined His words. The high priest responded with dramatic outrage. He tore his robes in

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a public display of horror and offense, and he declared that Jesus had committed blasphemy and announced that no further witnesses were needed.

Ironically, the high priest, claiming to defend God's honor, rejected God's own Son. Jesus spoke truthfully about who He was, and that truth was dismissed as blasphemy. The leaders accused Jesus of dishonoring God while standing guilty of the very offense they condemned Jesus for. When the religious leader said that witnesses were no longer necessary, the reality of the trial was revealed. Jesus's confession simply supplied the justification they had been hoping for.

Once the verdict was pronounced, the atmosphere changed. What had been presented as a legal proceeding turned into open abuse. In verse 65, Jesus was spat on, blindfolded, struck, and mocked. The guards demanded that He prophesy, turning His claim of divine knowledge into a cruel joke. Though convinced of their own righteousness, they acted with cruelty and contempt.

Again, Jesus did not respond. He did not resist or curse His attackers. He endured humiliation in silence. Though equal with God, Jesus received cruelty without returning it. But in God's providence, His suffering was not meaningless. This was the path God had chosen, the means by which salvation would come.

What would it look like for you to entrust your life to God?

Jesus's Accusers Rejected the Son of God

Jesus was condemned because His identity threatened those who held power. To accept Jesus would have required the religious leaders to repent of their

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THEOLOGY Connection

CHRIST'S HUMILIATION: Although God the Son was equal with God the Father and worthy of all the glory God receives, He chose to humble Himself by taking on human flesh. He left His glorious state and came in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3), and He experienced a humiliating death on a cross (Phil. 2:6-8) by becoming sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).

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sins, surrendering the authority they were desperate to protect. The truth was rejected because it carried a cost. When the truth of Christ confronts our pride or our desire for control, we might be tempted to resist and reject it. But rejection of the truth does not change the truth. Unbelief only hardens the heart against it.

The mockery Jesus endured also reveals how unbelief works. When people believe someone does not have actual authority over them, they ridicule and dismiss them. By blindfolding Jesus and striking Him, the guards were trying to show that His claims were empty. Their demand that He prophesy was meant to humiliate Him. Throughout His ministry, Jesus healed the sick and performed miracles, yet He never used His power to entertain skeptics.

Jesus remained silent because He trusted the Father completely. He knew the path unfolding before Him had purpose. For the first readers of Mark's Gospel, many of whom faced persecution, this account would have been deeply encouraging. Jesus knew what false accusation and unjust treatment looked like. Yet what looked like the triumph of evil became the means of salvation. Jesus stood condemned so that sinners might stand forgiven. He was treated as guilty so that those who trust Him might be declared righteous.

Following Christ does not guarantee comfort or approval from the world. There will be times when faithfulness to Jesus leads to misunderstanding, criticism, or even opposition. Because of Christ, we can face hardship with confidence, knowing that our hope rests in our Savior, not in the approval of man.

The events surrounding Jesus's trial are not only part of the story of His suffering, they also confront us with a decision. We must consider how we will

GOSPEL Connection

Because of the false claims against Jesus and His true claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God, Jesus was judged to be a blasphemer, deserving of death by crucifixion. Yet it was all part of God's plan that Jesus would die to be a substitute for our sin so that we may have salvation.

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respond to Jesus. Will we judge Him according to our own expectations, or will we trust Him as He reveals Himself in Scripture? True faith receives Jesus as He truly is and submits to His authority rather than reshaping Him into something that feels safer or more comfortable.

How might people today misunderstand the identity of Jesus Christ?

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HEAD

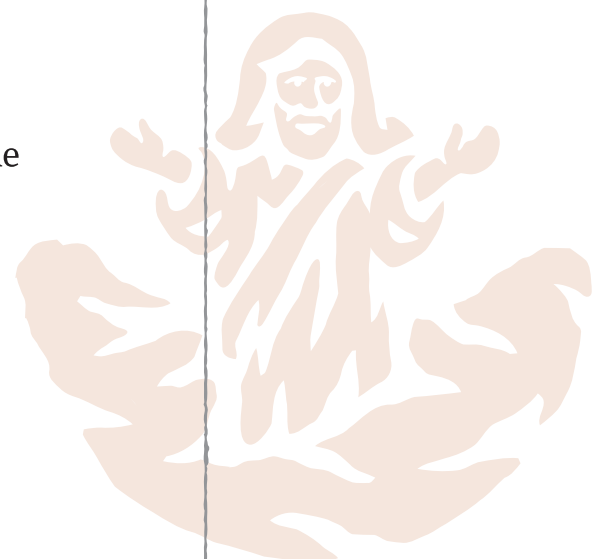
What truths should we remember when we are tempted to lie?

HEART

How can the Spirit help you take a stand for truth when you are afraid?

HANDS

How will you tell the truth about Jesus in the coming week?



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THE CRUCIFIXION

CORE PASSAGE: MARK 15:16-20,29-39

Context: The cross of Christ is the centerpiece of the Christian faith. Without the cross, there is no forgiveness for sin. Throughout Mark's Gospel, he portrayed Jesus as the Servant-King who suffered for our salvation. After Jesus's trial before the Sanhedrin, He was spit upon, mocked, and beaten by the Jewish leaders. Pilate had Him flogged. And then the Roman soldiers made a mockery of His kingship, adorning Him with a purple robe and a crown of thorns. Finally, under the charge of being "The King of the Jews" (Mark 15:26), Jesus, the perfectly sinless One, was crucified between two criminals.

Key Concept: Jesus suffered persecution, humiliation, and death to reconcile us to the Father.

DAILY READINGS

- ☐ **Day 1:** Mark 15:6-21
- ☐ **Day 2:** Mark 15:22-47
- ☐ **Day 3:** Matthew 27:15-66
- ☐ **Day 4:** Luke 23:13-56
- ☐ **Day 5:** John 18:39–19:42
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 22

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Jesus endured suffering as part of God's plan of salvation for humanity (Mark 15:16-20,29-32).

16 The soldiers led him away into the palace (that is, the governor's residence) and called the whole company together. 17 They dressed him in a purple robe, twisted together a crown of thorns, and put it on him. 18 And they began to salute him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" 19 They were hitting him on the head with a stick and spitting on him. Getting down on their knees, they were paying him homage. 20 After they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple robe and put his clothes on him. They led him out to crucify him. . . . 29 Those who passed by were yelling insults at him, shaking their heads, and saying, "Ha! The one who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, 30 save yourself by coming down from the cross!" 31 In the same way, the chief priests with the scribes were mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others, but he cannot save himself! 32 Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, so that we may see and believe." Even those who were crucified with him taunted him.

Jesus Was Humiliated by Those Who Rejected Him

As Jesus took up the cross, the tension that had been building throughout His ministry finally reached its peak. Early on, the religious leaders questioned His authority and rejected His message, but now they had the means to kill Him. The crowds that followed Him were gone, and the religious leaders led the charge against Him.

When Jesus was handed over to the Roman authorities, the situation turned into more than a religious

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conflict. His suffering became public. What Jesus faced was not only death but an execution designed to bring humiliation and suffering. This was how Rome showed its power, and Jesus would endure it fully. Yet none of this was outside of God's plan. What looked like the triumph of evil was the means by which God would bring about reconciliation.

Beginning in verse 17, the Roman soldiers subjected Jesus to public humiliation. After leading Him into the palace, they gathered the whole company around Him, turning His suffering into a display for all to see. They dressed Him in a purple robe, pressed a crown of thorns onto His head, and began to salute Him with mocking words, "Hail, king of the Jews!" (vv. 17-18). Every action was meant to strip Him of dignity and present Him as a counterfeit king.

The robe, the crown, and their kneeling were meant to parody royal honor. They bowed in ridicule, not reverence. They struck Him, spat on Him, and mocked Him openly. In their eyes, Jesus was nothing more than a failed revolutionary whose claims deserved to be laughed at. The One who spoke with authority, healed the sick, and calmed the storm was now treated as powerless and insignificant.

Yet as the scene continues, an unavoidable irony becomes clear. The One whom they mocked truly is King. The symbols they used to shame Him pointed to a reality they could not see. The robe and the crown were not false in themselves, even though they were used to mock our Savior. In their mockery, the soldiers unintentionally spoke the truth about Jesus's identity. He is the King, though not the kind they expected.

The crown of thorns was an important detail connected to the curse introduced in Genesis 3:17-18,

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where the ground would produce thorns and thistles because of sin. By placing this crown on Jesus, His sufferings were connected to the brokenness of the world. He was not only experiencing injustice at the hands of men, He was bearing the weight of the curse itself.[1] What we see here is more than humiliation; it is substitution. Jesus took upon Himself what rightfully belonged to humanity.

To be clear, these circumstances were not beyond Jesus's control. He willingly suffered to accomplish God's plan. The shame, the pain, and the rejection were all part of what He came to accomplish. In this moment, our understanding of kingship was reshaped. Earthly rulers secure their power through strength and control, yet Jesus revealed an entirely different kind of rule. He did not reign by avoiding suffering but by willingly stepping into it. His power was not expressed through domination but through faithful obedience to the Father's will. Jesus did not reach glory by avoiding humiliation. Jesus showed us that true glory is not about protecting yourself but about giving yourself for others. The King was revealed in suffering as He carried the weight of our sin.

How does Jesus's suffering relate to His call for disciples to take up their cross and follow Him (Matt. 16:24)?

Jesus's Mockers Thought Death Would Prove Him False

As Jesus hung on the cross, His rejection became complete and unmistakable. The mockery that began with the soldiers now spread to everyone present. Those passing by insulted Him, twisting His earlier words

GOSPEL Connection

Jesus's suffering included humiliation, torture, mockery, and death. He endured it all for us. His mission of salvation was fulfilled through His sacrifice and resurrection to reconcile us to the Father and give us direct access to Him.

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about the temple (Mark 15:29). The chief priests and scribes joined in, using theological language to reinforce their rejection (v. 31). Even those crucified beside Him added their voices to the ridicule. It seemed that all had turned against Him.

In this, the condition of the human heart was exposed. The rejection of Jesus was not limited to a few individuals or one group. It was something shared by all. Apart from God's grace, people do not naturally recognize or receive Jesus as Savior. As John 1:11 says, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." The cross made that truth unmistakable. At the center of the people's mockery was a common way of thinking about power. They assumed that true power must be proven through visible strength and immediate rescue. In their minds, if Jesus really were who He claimed to be, then He would come down from the cross. To them, suffering meant failure, and death only proved His claims were not true.

But their reasoning was built on a misunderstanding of His mission. Jesus remained on the cross because He was unwilling to abandon the purpose for which He came. In John 10:17-18, Jesus said:

> This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.

Jesus chose to endure the suffering. Every moment He remained on the cross was an act of obedience to the Father and of love toward sinners. What appeared to be weakness was the clearest display of His strength.

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The repeated challenge for Jesus to save Himself in verses 30-32 reflects a deeply rooted human instinct. People naturally seek self-preservation. These instincts shape how power and success are defined in human terms. Yet the cross still confronts these ideas. True power is not shown by escaping suffering but by fulfilling God's will even when it leads to suffering. Jesus is the perfect example of this. He did not use His power to avoid the cross. He used it to remain on the cross. And the irony isn't missed: "He saved others, but he cannot save himself!" (v. 31). What the religious leaders saw as inability was actually faithfulness. Jesus did not save Himself because He was saving others. Because He stayed, salvation was secured.

While Jesus's suffering was an example of endurance and faithfulness, it also showed substitution. Jesus stood in the place of sinners, bearing the penalty our sin deserves to offer us forgiveness. As Isaiah 53:5 prophesied: "He was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities." The judgment for our sin fell on Him so that it would not fall on us. The cross was not accidental. It was necessary. It was essential. Through Jesus's suffering and death on the cross, the work of reconciliation was accomplished.

What kept Jesus on the cross when He could have saved Himself?

Jesus died to reconcile us to God and to give us direct access to Him (Mark 15:33-39).

33 When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34 And at three Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lemá sabachtháni?*"

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which is translated, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" [35] When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "See, he's calling for Elijah." [36] Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, fixed it on a stick, offered him a drink, and said, "Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down." [37] Jesus let out a loud cry and breathed his last. [38] Then the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. [39] When the centurion, who was standing opposite him, saw the way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

Jesus Cried Out to God in His Suffering

From noon until three in the afternoon, darkness covered the land. This was not a natural occurrence. Throughout Scripture, darkness is often associated with judgment (Amos 5:18-20; Joel 2:1-2; Zeph. 1:14-15). The prophets spoke of the day of the Lord as a time when God would act against sin in justice (Isa. 13:9; Obad. 15). In this moment, that imagery became reality.

The cross was the place where God dealt with sin in a final and decisive way. Jesus hung in the place of sinners, bearing the judgment that sin deserves. The darkness served as a reminder that sin is serious. Sin is not a minor failure or a small mistake; it is rebellion against the holy God. Sin brings separation and judgment. Yet here is the heart of the gospel: the judgment that rightly belongs to sinners fell on Christ instead.

How might the theme of darkness help us understand what God was doing through Jesus on the cross?

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us (leading us to faith and worship), we have to see it as something done by us (leading us to repentance)."[2]
–John Stott (1921–2011)

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In this darkness, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Mark 15:34). These words come directly from Psalm 22, a psalm of David that begins with anguish and ends with confidence in God's deliverance. Jesus intentionally drew on a passage of Scripture that would have been familiar to those who heard Him.

The psalmist opened with a cry of apparent abandonment, feeling distant from God and surrounded by suffering. What David described subjectively closely mirrored what Jesus experienced objectively on the cross. The psalmist was mocked and rejected by those who sneered, "He relies on the LORD; let him save him; let the LORD rescue him, since he takes pleasure in him" (Ps. 22:7-8). He even described his despair as hands and feet being pierced and garments being divided (vv. 16,18). Yet what David experienced poetically, the eternal Son of David fulfilled completely.

Nevertheless, Psalm 22 does not end in despair. The suffering one declared that God had not hidden His face, and David closed the psalm with a vision of the nations turning to the Lord. On the cross, Jesus called attention to the suffering described in the psalm but also to its larger message. Even in this moment of anguish, He was still speaking within the framework of Scripture and the plan of God.

Jesus was not detached from what was happening. He was not numb to the suffering. He didn't suffer in silence. He cried out. He prayed. Even during the most intense moment of suffering, He turned to the Father. The cry itself was an expression of faith. Though He felt the weight of God's wrath, He did not turn away from the Father. This cry revealed the full reality of His humanity. Jesus truly entered into anguish, bearing

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the full weight and pain of death in a way that was real and personal. As He hung on the cross, Jesus bore the consequences of sin, including the separation that sin brings. While the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son was not broken, Jesus truly experienced the relational weight of abandonment as He stood in the place of sinners.

This gives us a glimpse of the true cost of reconciliation. Bringing sinners back into a right relationship with God was not simple or easy. It required a costly sacrifice. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "[God] made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." The cross is love expressed through sacrifice.

After this cry of prayer, Jesus let out a loud cry and breathed His last. Earlier, Jesus had said that no one takes His life from Him but that He lays it down willingly. At this moment, Jesus willingly gave up His life. The Old Testament sacrificial system pointed forward to this moment. Year after year, sacrifices were offered as an atonement for sin, but they could never fully remove the guilt. They pointed beyond themselves to something greater (see Lev. 16). In Jesus, that greater sacrifice was finally given. His death was sufficient, final, and effective. It did not need to be repeated. It accomplished what all previous sacrifices could only anticipate. Through Jesus's death on the cross, sin was dealt with completely. The weight of judgment was carried on our behalf, the cost was paid, and the way for reconciliation was secured.

Jesus's Suffering Led to Direct Access to God

At the moment of Jesus's death in verses 37-38, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

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The curtain separated the most holy place from the rest of the temple, marking off the place where God's presence uniquely rested (Ex. 26:31-34). The veil stood as a constant reminder that sin created a barrier between God and humanity and access to Him was restricted (Isa. 59:2). Under the old covenant, only the high priest could enter that inner place, and then only once a year after sacrifice (Heb. 9:6-7). The curtain itself testified that the way into God's presence had not yet been opened (v. 8). It was a visible reminder that sin still alienated the holy God and His people.

When Jesus died, that barrier was torn in two. The old sacrificial system had been fulfilled. With His own holy and atoning blood, Jesus entered not an earthly sanctuary but heaven itself to offer His sacrifice once for all (vv. 11-12). The curtain was torn because Christ removed what separated us from God.

The direction of the tear also was important. The veil was torn from top to bottom, showing that it was not something initiated by people. God Himself opened the way.[3] What sin had separated, God made a way to restore. Through the death of Jesus, access to God is no longer tied to a place, a system, or a repeated set of sacrifices. As the book of Hebrews explains, Jesus is the great high priest who has entered once for all into God's presence and made a way for others to follow. Because of Him, believers can now approach God with confidence (10:19-22).

The tearing of the veil changed everything about our relationship with God. We are no longer standing outside waiting for access that we cannot obtain on our own. Through Christ, we are brought near. Reconciliation is more than forgiveness; it is the restoration of relationship. Reconciliation means that hostility

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THEOLOGY Connection

CHRIST AS SACRIFICE: There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Heb. 10:4), Christ's sacrifice on the cross was able to permanently, "once and for all," take away sins.

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has been replaced with peace and distance has been replaced with nearness.

In the midst of all that was taking place, one voice stood out. A Roman centurion, watching the crucifixion, declared, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39). The religious leaders, who should have recognized Jesus, rejected Him. Yet this Gentile outsider recognized what others had refused to see. The Man they had just crucified was no ordinary man.

In this we see a reversal. Those who were closest to the promises and expectations of the Messiah rejected Him, while a Gentile responded with recognition and confession. This does not mean that God had abandoned His people, but it does point to something larger. Through the death of Jesus, the way was being opened for all people, not just one nation. The recognition of the centurion anticipated what would become clear in the gospel message: the good news of Jesus Christ extends beyond Israel to the nations.

The cross became the place where barriers are removed. The cross revealed who Jesus was, and it reveals who truly belongs to Him, not by ethnicity or background but by faith. Those who see and believe, whether Jew or Gentile, are brought into the same relationship with God. And the cross demands a response. It does not allow for neutrality. Some see it and turn away, hardened in unbelief. Others see it and recognize the truth. The cross still reveals, still confronts, and still calls people to respond.

Because of what Jesus has done, reconciliation with God is now possible for all who trust in Him. Forgiveness is offered, relationship is restored, and access to the Father is opened. This truth is the foundation of salvation and the foundation of the Christian life.

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"Let us leave the passage with a deep sense of the enormous debt which all believers owe to Christ. All that they have, and are, and hope for, may be traced up to the doing and dying of the Son of God. Through his condemnation they have acquittal—through his sufferings, peace—through his shame, glory—through his death, life."[4]

–J. C. Ryle (1816–1900)

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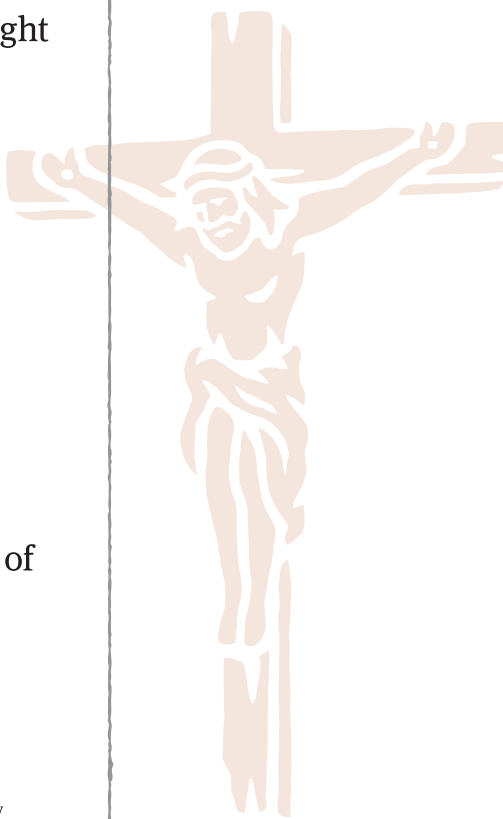
It shapes how we approach God, how we understand who we are, and how we live each day.

The cross stands as both an invitation and dividing line. The question is not just about what happened at the cross but how we will respond to it. Will we turn away, or will we, like the centurion, see and confess the truth about Jesus?

What are some ways believers benefit from direct access to God through Jesus Christ?

HEAD

What common responses to Jesus's crucifixion might we encounter today?



HEART

Why should Jesus's suffering on the cross lead us toward repentance of sin and obedience to God?

HANDS

How will you follow Jesus's example and take up your cross this week, willing to suffer for the sake of Christ and others?

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UNIT 28 • SESSION 3

THE RESURRECTION

CORE PASSAGE: MATTHEW 28:1-15

Context: The Gospel accounts of Jesus's crucifixion are full of various witnesses, some complicit in the murder of Jesus and others distraught by His condemnation. These men and women could truly testify to the death of Jesus. The crowds who jeered at Jesus, the women who looked on from a distance, and the centurion who proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God all saw Jesus die. And then He was buried in a tomb sealed by a stone and guarded by soldiers. Yet on Sunday morning, the angel proclaimed the good news that Jesus is alive.

Key Concept: We need to share the good news of Jesus's resurrection with all people.

DAILY READINGS

- ☐ **Day 1:** Matthew 28:1-10
- ☐ **Day 2:** Matthew 28:11-15
- ☐ **Day 3:** Mark 16:1-8
- ☐ **Day 4:** Luke 24:1-12
- ☐ **Day 5:** John 20:1-10
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 68

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The news of Jesus's resurrection caused fear and joy (Matthew 28:1-8).

1 After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to view the tomb. 2 There was a violent earthquake, because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and approached the tomb. He rolled back the stone and was sitting on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. 4 The guards were so shaken by fear of him that they became like dead men. 5 The angel told the women, "Don't be afraid, because I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here. For he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has risen from the dead and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there.' Listen, I have told you." 8 So, departing quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, they ran to tell his disciples the news.

Women Witnessed the Wonder

Matthew's resurrection account began early Sunday morning just after the Sabbath, when everything seemed finished. Jesus had been crucified under Roman authority, His body had been placed in a borrowed tomb, and a stone had been rolled across its entrance. Guards were stationed to ensure that no one disturbed it. Jesus, the One who had drawn crowds, spoken with authority, and made bold claims, was dead.

Matthew, however, did not write as though the story had reached its end. The resurrection was not an unexpected twist but the moment toward which

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everything had been moving. What unfolded was not just the reversal of death but the revelation of who Jesus truly is and what He accomplished. Through the resurrection, the human heart is also exposed. The same event led some to worship while others responded with doubt, denial, and resistance. The resurrection revealed Christ, and it pressed the question of whether we receive the truth or reshape it according to our own desires.

Matthew recorded a simple but significant scene. The grieving women came to the tomb at dawn, expecting to finish the funeral rites the Sabbath had cut short. Their actions reflected their love for Jesus, yet from their perspective, death had already spoken its final word. They did not come expecting a miracle. They came to mourn their teacher and friend.

Before they arrived, however, God acted. A violent earthquake signaled that God intervened, a clear interruption of the natural order. An angel descended, rolled back the stone, and sat on it. The stone, which once marked finality, had been removed with ease.

In verse 5, when the angel spoke to the women, he said, "Don't be afraid." The women were not scolded for their fear or turned away. They were met with grace because the angel knew their purpose. They were looking for "Jesus who was crucified." The same Jesus who suffered and died was the One who rose from the dead. The angel then said: "He is not here. For he has risen, just as he said" (v. 6).

The resurrection is not simply an idea or symbol but a real historical event. The tomb was empty. Jesus had risen physically. His promise had been fulfilled, and He had been vindicated.[1] The resurrection confirmed that His words could be trusted. Since He

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spoke truthfully about His death and resurrection, His claims about sin, salvation, and eternal life certainly carry full authority.

The angel invited the women to "come and see the place where he lay" (v. 6). The women were not asked to believe without reason but were shown physical evidence that Jesus is alive. Then Matthew moved from seeing to telling. The angel instructed them, "Go quickly and tell his disciples" (v. 7). The pattern was being established: believe and tell others. The women were given the task of announcing the resurrection.

It is not a small thing that God chose women as the first witnesses. As Craig Blomberg observed:

> In an environment in which women's testimony was regularly deemed less trustworthy than men's, in a climate in which only rarely could their testimony be accepted in a Jewish court of law, what individual or movement would ever invent accounts of women being the sole, initial witnesses tasked with the responsibility of passing on to the male disciples what they had seen and heard, including commands for those male disciples as to where they should go to see Jesus?[2]

This reflects how God often works out His plan through those the world would not expect.

Matthew described the women's response as both "fear and great joy" (v. 8). These two emotions belonged together. Fear showed their awe before God's power, and joy reflected that they understood what had taken place. Their Savior was alive. Death had not prevailed.

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GOSPEL Connection

Jesus's resurrection gives proof that He is the Son of God and has won the victory over sin and death, which means we too have victory over sin and death. This is good news to be shared.

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The resurrection was not meant to remain private. Those who encountered the risen Christ were called to share that message. Faith did not end at the empty tomb but moved outward in proclamation. Like the women, believers are entrusted with the good news that Jesus is alive, and that changes everything.

Why is the physical resurrection of Jesus a necessary part of the gospel?

The Guards Responded with Terror

Matthew presented a clear contrast between the women and the soldiers appointed to guard the tomb. These soldiers represented human authority and control. Their presence was supposed to prevent any disruptions from happening. From a human standpoint, the situation appeared settled.

When the angel appeared, however, that sense of control collapsed immediately. Matthew recorded that the guards were so overcome with fear that "they became like dead men" (v. 4). The irony is clear: The living men assigned to guard the dead now resembled the dead, while Jesus, who had died, was now alive.

The limits of human power are clearly shown in this scene. In Psalm 2, the psalmist proclaimed that nations gather and rulers set themselves against the Lord and His anointed, attempting to resist His authority. Yet the psalm makes clear that such efforts are futile, as God establishes His rule regardless of human opposition. In the same way, the guards, the sealed tomb, and the authority behind them could not prevent what God had already determined to accomplish. What appeared secure from a human perspective was overturned the moment God acted.

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The contrast between the guards and the women shows how different people respond to truth. Both the guards and the women witnessed the same event. Both saw the same display of divine power. Yet their responses were entirely different. The guards were overwhelmed with fear to the point of collapse. The women were reassured and given a mission.

The difference was in their relationship with Jesus. Those who opposed or ignored Jesus experienced the power of God raising Him from the dead as something unsettling and threatening. Those who sought Him in love experienced that same power as a source of comfort and hope. The resurrection revealed both the authority of Christ and the condition of the human heart.

Additionally, the resurrection is not presented as a neutral event. It confronts every person with a decision. It cannot be ignored or reduced to a story that has no impact on our lives. The resurrection demands a response. Will you respond like the guards, overcome and resistant, or like the women, who received the message with faith and acted in obedience? God's purposes cannot be stopped. Human efforts to contain or control the work of God ultimately fail. The resurrection stands as a clear declaration that God's power is greater than the power of death, greater than human authority, and greater than every obstacle placed in His way.

What reasons might you fear sharing the gospel with others?

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"The resurrection of Christ is the single greatest event in the history of the world. Without it, our Savior's incarnation, life, and death as our Substitute and Surety would be altogether meaningless. The resurrection of our Lord is so vital a doctrine that those who deny it deny Christianity altogether."[3]
–Don Fortner (1950–2020)

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Jesus will reveal Himself to those who truly seek Him (Matthew 28:9-15).

9 Just then Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" They came up, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus told them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there." 11 As they were on their way, some of the guards came into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. 12 After the priests had assembled with the elders and agreed on a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money 13 and told them, "Say this, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him while we were sleeping.' 14 If this reaches the governor's ears, we will deal with him and keep you out of trouble." 15 They took the money and did as they were instructed, and this story has been spread among Jewish people to this day.

Jesus Reassured the Women

As the women responded in obedience to the angel's command, the focus shifted from announcement to encounter. The resurrection was not left as a message to consider from a distance. Jesus Himself met the women on their way to find the disciples. The One they had come to mourn now stood before them alive. His greeting was brief, but His presence confirmed the reality of what had taken place. Immediately the women took hold of His feet, confirming that Jesus was physically present. Not a vision or a spirit, Jesus was alive, embodied. The resurrection was not abstract but grounded in history and reality.

The women's response was immediate and fitting. They worshiped Jesus. What had been revealed

THEOLOGY Connection

RESURRECTION: Both the Old and New Testaments teach that one day believers will experience a resurrection of the body from the dead (Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:12-14; John 11). The promise of the resurrection is found in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and it will take place at the future return of Christ. (cont.)

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throughout Jesus's ministry now stood in full clarity. Jesus was not only a teacher or a prophet—He is the Son of God, worthy of worship. The resurrection did not add to His identity; it confirmed it. This moment also protected against reducing the resurrection to a truth that could be affirmed without a personal response. The resurrection calls for more than agreement. It calls for surrender, devotion, and worship.

In verse 10, Jesus spoke to them, repeating the angel's words: "Do not be afraid." His presence replaced fear with assurance. What had been uncertainty was now met with confidence. The power that raised Jesus from the dead was not a threat to His followers but a source of comfort. That was the pattern established by the Old Testament. When God revealed Himself to His people, fear often followed, yet His word brought reassurance. In Isaiah 41:10, spoken to Israel in a time of uncertainty, God declared, "Do not fear, for I am with you." In its original setting, this promise assured God's people of His presence and sustaining power despite their weakness. In the same way, the risen Jesus now spoke peace to His followers, grounding their confidence in His presence.

Jesus then gave a clear instruction: "Go and tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there" (Matt. 28:10). The use of the word "brothers" reveals something important. These disciples had fled in fear and abandoned Jesus. Yet Jesus did not distance Himself from them. He did not define their relationship based on their failure. He called them His brothers—the only time He did so in the Gospels—revealing the nature of grace in light of the resurrection.

The disciples were not cast aside. The resurrection did not expose their failure in order to condemn

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THEOLOGY Connection

(cont.) Because Christ was the firstfruits of the resurrection, Christians can be assured that their resurrection will be similar in nature, meaning it will be both bodily and glorious (Phil. 3:20-21; Rom. 8:22-23). The hope of the future resurrection gives Christians confidence that death has been defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ.

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them but overcame their failure in order to restore them. This theme was anticipated in passages such as Zechariah 13. Zechariah spoke of judgment against His Shepherd and the scattering of God's people (v. 7). Yet the wider passage points toward refinement and restoration. Jesus had already applied this text to His disciples' failure (Matt. 26:31). Now after the resurrection, that scattering gave way to regathering.

The instruction to go to Galilee also pointed forward. The resurrection was not the conclusion of Jesus's work but the beginning. The risen Christ was not only alive but active, leading, and sending. The resurrection assures us that Christ continues to call His people into relationship and mission.

How does it encourage you to know that Jesus does not abandon us in our weakness?

The Religious Leaders Paid Off the Guards

Matthew then shifted the scene to the guards and the religious leaders, creating another contrast. While the women responded with worship and obedience, the guards went into the city and reported what had happened (28:11). The truth was now set before the chief priests and elders at a point of decision. They were not dealing with rumors or secondhand reports. They heard testimony from those who had been present. The tomb was empty. The reality of the resurrection confronted them.

Their response, however, was not repentance or reconsideration. They gathered together and formed a plan, showing that their rejection was deliberate. They understood what the resurrection implied, and they chose to reject it. So they gave the soldiers a large

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sum of money and instructed them to spread a false account (vv. 12-13). The explanation they offered was weak. If the guards had been asleep, they could not have known what took place. The purpose was not to present a convincing argument but to supply just enough doubt to turn people away from the truth.

This moment revealed the nature of unbelief. This was not the result of a lack of evidence. The leaders had access to the facts. Their resistance came from an unwillingness to accept what those facts revealed. To acknowledge the resurrection would mean acknowledging Jesus as Lord and submitting to His authority. That was what they refused to do. In Isaiah 6:9-10, God described a people who heard but did not understand and who saw but did not perceive. Even though Israel had received clear revelation, they continued to resist God's message. In the same way, the religious leaders had seen and heard the truth, but they refused to respond rightly.

Matthew mentioned in 28:15 that this false account continued to circulate. Opposition to the resurrection began immediately and continues today. The truth of the resurrection has consistently been met with attempts to deny or explain it away. The difference in response to the resurrection is not in the evidence but in the posture of the heart.

Today, this speaks to how we walk through seasons when God's purposes are not immediately clear. Many people assume that strong faith means having everything figured out, but the resurrection narrative shows something different. Faithfulness is most often seen in simply continuing to trust Christ no matter what. We see this in the parent who keeps praying for a rebellious child, the believer who opens the Scriptures

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when they feel spiritually dry, or the church member who continues to gather with God's people while carrying heavy burdens. The posture of the heart is not measured by emotional intensity or intellectual certainty but by a steady movement toward Christ.

We often interpret our circumstances through the lens of loss or finality, yet the resurrection teaches us that God is always working beyond what we can see. A heart shaped by the resurrection begins to live with a kind of settled expectation, not that life will be easy but that death and defeat never have the final word.

The resurrection of Jesus is not only something we look back on, it is something we are moving toward. As Paul wrote in Philippians 3:20-21:

> Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject everything to himself.

Salvation will one day be made complete when our bodies are raised and made new.

Christian hope is grounded in the truth that just as Jesus rose bodily, we too will be raised bodily. Just as His resurrection body was glorified, so ours will be too. We are not just enduring this life in hopes of escape, we are awaiting restoration. What we do in the body matters. Suffering in the body is not meaningless, and neither is faithfulness.

Every act of obedience, every moment of perseverance, and every step toward Christ is lived in anticipation of that final renewal. Believers continue to seek Jesus not only because of what He has done

Voices from THE CHURCH

"So what does it mean for Jesus to have absolute authority over you and me? First, it means He reigns over us supremely. Jesus is the sovereign Ruler over our lives. This is the case whether we believe it or not. Just as the grass is green, regardless of whether or not you believe it, so also Jesus is Lord over you regardless of your approval."[4]
–David Platt

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but because of what He has promised to do in us. So the same movement we see in the women at the tomb becomes the pattern for the Christian life. We come to Christ as we are, sometimes confused or weary but always drawn by love. And as we come, we are reminded that the story does not end in death but in resurrection, not only Jesus's but ours as well.

How do we affirm the truth of the resurrection when many people are skeptical of truth claims?

HEAD

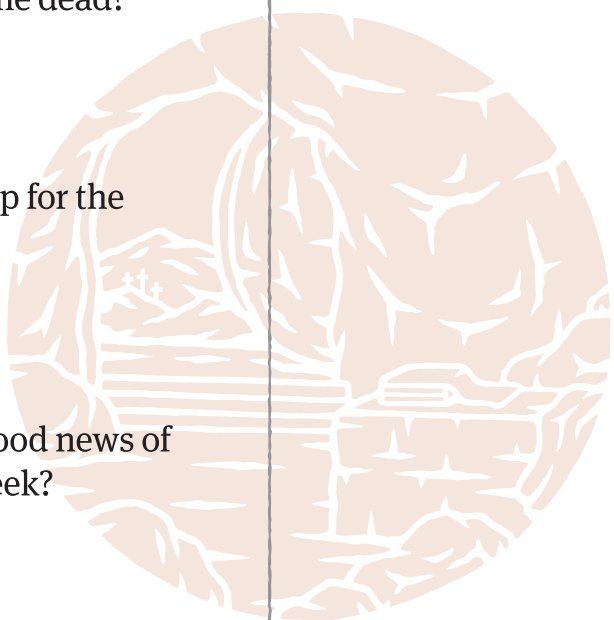
What presuppositions and beliefs keep people from believing in Jesus's resurrection from the dead?

HEART

What keeps you from joy in and worship for the resurrected Jesus, and why?

HANDS

What steps will you take to share the good news of Jesus's resurrection with others this week?



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UNIT 28 • SESSION 4

THE APPEARANCES

CORE PASSAGE: JOHN 20:19-31

Context: The apostle John explicitly stated the reason he wrote his Gospel—so that readers would believe that Jesus is the Messiah and receive life in His name (John 20:31). Everything in John's Gospel served this purpose, from John's reflection on the Word's preexistence to seven signs Jesus performed and seven "I am" statements that revealed His identity and purpose. Naturally, Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection also point to this end. Yet so do Jesus's appearances to His followers after His resurrection. These interactions revealed His glory and prepared the disciples for their mission, which we share as believers today.

Key Concept: The appearances of the resurrected Jesus reveal He is the Messiah, the Son of God.

DAILY READINGS

- ☐ **Day 1:** John 20:11-18
- ☐ **Day 2:** Luke 24:13-49
- ☐ **Day 3:** John 20:19–21:25
- ☐ **Day 4:** Matthew 28:16-20
- ☐ **Day 5:** Luke 24:50-53
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 108

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Jesus's resurrection results in joy and our receiving the Holy Spirit (John 20:19-25).

19 When it was evening on that first day of the week, the disciples were gathered together with the doors locked because they feared the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 Having said this, he showed them his hands and his side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you." 22 After saying this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 24 But Thomas (called "Twin"), one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were telling him, "We've seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "If I don't see the mark of the nails in his hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Seeing Jesus Results in Joy

In John 20:19, the situation changed, though the disciples had not yet fully grasped it. The tomb was empty. The women had given the news, and Peter and John had seen the empty tomb (vv. 3-9). Yet the disciples remained behind locked doors, uncertain and afraid. They had followed Jesus, listened to His teachings, and witnessed His authority firsthand. When the moment of crisis came, they scattered. Even now, after news of the resurrection, they were afraid, unsure of what lay ahead.

John presented the disciples, of whom he was one, as ordinary men attempting to make sense of Jesus's

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death. Even though they were gathered together, inwardly they were still unsettled. Into this setting Jesus came. His presence was not conditioned on their understanding nor was it delayed until their faith grew. He met them in the midst of their fear. The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus were essential. They confirmed the reality of the resurrection, they restored the disciples in the wake of their failure, and they shaped what it truly means to believe.

John set the scene with precision: It was the evening of the first day of the week, the same day the empty tomb was discovered (v. 19). The disciples had heard that Jesus is alive, but they had not yet comprehended what that meant. Their perspective was still shaped by confusion, and as a result, their hearts remained troubled.

Suddenly, Jesus stood among them. The locked doors, which encapsulated both their fear and their limitation, presented no obstacle to the risen Christ. No barrier, physical or spiritual, can prevent Jesus from being with His people.

Jesus's greeting was direct and purposeful: "Peace be with you" (v. 19). This was more than the customary greeting *shalom*. Jesus's peace was rooted in what He had accomplished. Through His death and resurrection, sin was defeated, and the separation between God and humanity had been reconciled. The peace the disciples lacked was not something they would have to produce; it was what Christ now gives.

In verse 20, Jesus showed them His hands and His side. There wasn't a switcheroo on the cross. The One who stood before them was the same Jesus who was crucified. The wounds remained as evidence of what He achieved. The resurrection did not erase the

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cross; it revealed its meaning. The marks were still visible because they were central to the victory that had been won.

At that point, the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord (v. 20). Their fear gave way to joy. The same room, the same locked doors, and the same threats remained, yet the disciples were no longer the same. Seeing Jesus reframed their entire situation. What they had interpreted as loss was now recognized as victory. What seemed to be the end of the story was revealed to be the turning point in God's plan. The resurrection did not simply add a new chapter but redefined everything that came before it.

Fear had narrowed their perspective. Now joy expanded that perspective, anchoring it in the reality of who Christ is and what He accomplished. Resurrection joy does not depend on the removal of difficulty, nor does it wait for conditions to improve; rather, it is rooted in the presence of the risen Lord. When Jesus is seen rightly, everything else is placed in its proper context. The threats that once dominated the disciples' thinking no longer defined them. Instead, the reality of Christ's victory became the controlling truth.

After this moment, the disciples would no longer be a scattered, fearful group trying to recover from loss. They joyfully would bear witness to the risen Christ for the rest of their lives. This passage reminds us that true joy is inseparable from seeing Christ rightly. When believers understand who Jesus is and what He has done, fear loosens its grip and joy takes its place as a settled response to the reality of the resurrection.

How does knowing the truth of the resurrection help us not to fear?

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GOSPEL Connection

The many witnesses to Jesus after His resurrection reveal the truth of His identity as the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Jesus was sent by the Father and now sends us to spread the gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Jesus Sends with the Holy Spirit

After giving the disciples peace, Jesus immediately connected that peace to purpose. He added, "As the Father has sent me, I also send you" (v. 21). The Father sent the Son with a clear and defined purpose, and the Son now extended that mission to His followers. Just as the Son was sent into the world to accomplish the will of the Father, so now those who belong to Jesus are sent into the world as witnesses to what He has accomplished.[1] The disciples' calling was rooted in the mission of Christ Himself.

Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus made known the way sinners are brought back into right relationship with God. When He sends His disciples, He does not give them a new or different message. They are sent to bear witness, to testify to what they have seen and heard, and to proclaim that reconciliation has been accomplished through Jesus. This also highlights the continuity of the mission. What began with the disciples in that room did not end with them but extends throughout the life of the church.

To be sent by Christ is to participate in what God is doing in the world. It also means the message cannot be reshaped or softened. The disciples—and all who follow—were not free to redefine the mission. They were entrusted with it. Their role was to faithfully proclaim what God has done, calling others to respond in repentance and faith. The sending in John 20 is the unfolding of God's redemptive purpose through His people. Those who had received peace through Christ were now sent to proclaim that peace, bearing witness to the finished work of Jesus and calling others into the life that is found in His name.

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Yet Jesus did not send them out on their own. In verse 22, He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." In Genesis 2:7, humanity received life from the breath of God. Here the disciples received new life from the risen Christ. This signaled the emergence of a new creation people, a community formed and sustained by the life that comes from Jesus.

The presence of the Spirit was—and is—essential to this mission. The disciples did not require greater determination or stronger resolve but divine empowerment. The Spirit provided what they lacked. He equipped them to speak with clarity, to endure opposition, and to remain faithful in the task they had been given.

In verse 23, Jesus spoke of forgiveness, directly connecting the disciples' mission to the message they would proclaim. While they did not have the authority in and of themselves to forgive sins, they were entrusted with telling people how to find forgiveness in Christ alone. Those who receive that message by faith receive forgiveness. Those who reject it remain in their sin. The authority they carried was not their own but from the truth of the gospel itself.

The mission given to the disciples has not ended as it continues in all who follow Christ. Believers today are sent into the world with the same message, called to proclaim the gospel with faithfulness and clarity. The resurrection leads to active participation. Those who have encountered the risen Christ are sent out to make Him known. Strengthened by the Spirit, we carry the message of life into a world still marked by fear, confusion, and uncertainty, and we can be confident that the same power that raised Christ from the dead is now at work in and through us.

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John mentioned, however, that one disciple was not present when Jesus appeared. Thomas, for whatever reason, was not with the disciples in the locked room. When the disciples told him the good news they had seen and heard, he doubted. He said, "If I don't see the mark of the nails in his hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe" (v. 25).

Thomas's doubt often gets overemphasized. As Bruce Barton observed:

> John 11:16 reveals Thomas as tough-minded and committed, even if he tended to be pessimistic. And Matthew points out (Matthew 28:17) that all the disciples shared Thomas's skepticism. It was part of his character to put the group's feeling into words. None of the other disciples believed until they saw Christ face-to-face.[2]

John's candid portrayal of the disciples as real people who struggled with assurance gives us a marvelous example of the power of the Holy Spirit to make doubting disciples into dynamic witnesses.

What are some practical ways you can have assurance in your faith?

Everything Jesus did was to show us that He is the Messiah, the Son of God (John 20:26-31).

[26] A week later his disciples were indoors again, and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." [27] Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and look at my hands. Reach out your

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hand and put it into my side. Don't be faithless, but believe." [28] Thomas responded to him, "My Lord and my God!" [29] Jesus said, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." [30] Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. [31] But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

True Seekers Find Jesus

In verse 26, John drew attention to the fact that a full week passed between Thomas's initial expression of doubt and his encounter with the risen Jesus. Thomas did not receive immediate resolution. He continued in uncertainty, hearing the testimony of the other disciples while still struggling to believe. This is a familiar pattern in the Christian life. There are seasons when clarity does not come quickly, when understanding seems delayed, and when faith is stretched by what remains unseen. Thomas's experience shows that these moments are not outside the scope of God's work. Delay, as we might understand it, is not the same as absence. The lack of immediate answers does not mean that Christ is not at work.

When the disciples gathered again, Thomas was with them. The doors were still locked, which may suggest the disciples were still afraid of the religious leaders' influence. Plus, the fullness of the Spirit's indwelling was still a few weeks away (see Acts 2).

Jesus appeared again and stood among them, the emphasis falling on His presence. His greeting was unchanged: "Peace be with you" (John 20:26). Even for the disciple who had openly questioned and

FIGURE Study

THOMAS: Also known as "Twin," Thomas has often been disparaged in church history for his doubt. He's been called a pessimist or skeptic. Yet Thomas had previously shown bravery (John 11:16) and a desire to know more of Jesus's plan (14:5). Like Thomas, we weren't there in the locked room when Jesus first appeared. His quest for evidence is our quest for evidence too.[3]

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doubted, Jesus's first word was one of assurance. Jesus then addressed Thomas directly. Being both personal and precise, He invited Thomas to see His hands and to touch His side, meeting him at the very point of his doubt (v. 27). Nothing Thomas had said was unknown to Jesus. He knew Thomas's questions, his hesitation, and his conditions for belief.

No question is hidden from Christ. No struggle escapes His notice. Yet His knowledge does not lead Him to withdraw. Jesus said, "Don't be faithless, but believe" (v. 27). While there was patience in these words, there was also direction. While doubts may arise, the goal is not to remain in uncertainty but to move toward trust.

Thomas responded with a clear and decisive confession: "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28). In that moment, Thomas recognized that Jesus is Lord and God, worthy of full allegiance and worship. Thomas's experience shows that doubt is not necessarily the end of the story. Jesus is not threatened by sincere questions. He meets those who seek Him and leads them, patiently and purposefully, toward belief.

What does it look like to seek Jesus with your whole heart?

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"Thomas had just confessed Jesus as God—absolutely, unconditionally, incontrovertibly God. John says, 'True.' And there are signs without number that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the anointed of God, the promised messiah of Israel, and God over all, blessed for evermore. To believe that is the basis of having 'life through his name.' His name here, 'Christ, the Son of God,' reveals his twofold nature."[4]
–John Phillips (1906–1982)

These Are Written So You May Believe

After recounting Thomas's confession, John stepped back from the immediate scene and explained why he had written His Gospel account the way he did. Each of the Gospel writers were led by the Holy Spirit to give an account of Jesus's life and earthly ministry, and each of them had their unique viewpoint. John, focusing on Jesus's identity as the Son of God, only recounted

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seven miraculous signs. John noted that Jesus performed many other signs that he did not record (v. 30), so what he included was purposeful and carefully chosen. John wrote down these things "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (v. 31). The signs and works of Jesus were not random displays of power or isolated moments of compassion. They were purposeful revelations. Each miracle, each teaching, and each encounter was directed toward a single aim—to make known who Jesus truly is.

As John's Gospel unfolds, these signs move the reader steadily toward a clear conclusion: Jesus is not only a teacher, a healer, or a prophet—Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Turning water into wine (2:1-11), healing the sick (4:46-54; 5:1-15; 9:1-11), feeding the multitude (6:1-14), walking on water (6:16-21), raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44), and ultimately Jesus's own resurrection all serve this purpose (20:1-29). These signs reveal Jesus's identity and call for a response that cannot remain neutral.

Belief is a response to what has been revealed. Scripture does not leave the reader with fragments or impressions but provides a coherent and trustworthy witness to the person and work of Christ. Faith rests on that witness, receiving as true what God has made known. In Isaiah 55:10-11, God describes His word as going out with purpose, accomplishing what He intends and not returning empty. That promise assured Israel that God's purposes would stand despite their uncertainty. In the same way, the written testimony about Jesus is not partial or ineffective. It accomplishes its purpose by revealing who Jesus is and calling people to believe.

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Jesus's words to Thomas in John 20:29 reinforce this point, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." With this statement, the focus extends beyond the immediate circle of the disciples to all who would come after them. Believers who do not encounter the risen Christ in the same physical manner are not placed at a disadvantage. Their faith rests on the testimony that has been given, a testimony that is sufficient because it is grounded in what God has revealed.

What has been written is enough. Scripture is enough to make known who Jesus is, enough to call for belief, and enough to lead to life. To believe that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God is to entrust oneself to Him, to recognize His authority, and to follow where He leads. The result of this belief is life (v. 31). This life is not confined to the future, though it certainly includes eternal life. Salvation begins in the present. This life is marked by a restored relationship with God, covered by forgiveness, shaped by peace, and defined by a new identity in Christ. Without belief, this life is not experienced. With belief, everything is changed.

John called for a response to the testimony that has been given. The signs were not lacking. The message was clearly set forth. The question is not whether enough has been revealed but whether that revelation will be received in faith. Like Thomas, readers are invited to move from uncertainty to confession, to recognize Jesus as Lord and God, and to trust that what has been written is sufficient to lead to the life found in His name.

The resurrection appearances of Jesus brought the entire account into focus. Jesus stood alive before His people, confirming He is exactly who He claimed to be. The disciples moved from fear to joy, from confusion to

THEOLOGY Connection

FAITH: Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

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clarity, and from hiding to being sent. Thomas moved from doubt to confession. John wrote so that the same response might follow in us. Though we have not seen Jesus in the way the first disciples did, we are called to believe on the basis of the witness that has been given. Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing in Him, we receive life in His name.

Who or what has helped you through seasons of doubt in your faith?

HEAD

How can we encourage people who have intellectual doubts to keep pursuing truth and seeking Jesus?

HEART

How can we continue to strengthen our faith when circumstances, doubts, or struggles lead us to doubt God?

HANDS

How will you live this week so that people know that Jesus is your Lord and God?



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UNIT 29
POST-RESURRECTION

ACTS

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Memory Verses

"Peter and the apostles replied, 'We must obey God rather than people. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had murdered by hanging him on a tree. God exalted this man to his right hand as ruler and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.'"

—Acts 5:29-32

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UNIT 29 • SESSION 1

JESUS SENDS US

CORE PASSAGE: ACTS 1:4-14

Context: The book of Acts is the second volume in a two-part work by Luke, a missionary companion of the apostle Paul. The two volumes are a single, continuous story with a slight overlap and expansion from the end of Luke to the start of Acts. While Luke's Gospel described "all that Jesus began to do and teach" during His earthly ministry (Acts 1:1), Acts presented all the Holy Spirit continued to do and teach through the church following Jesus's ascension. Luke reiterated that Jesus died, rose again, and "presented himself alive" to His followers "over a period of forty days" (v. 3) to set the stage for what Jesus would do next through His apostles.

Key Concept: Believers are empowered by the Holy Spirit to continue Christ's mission until His return.

DAILY READINGS

- ☐ **Day 1:** Acts 1:1-3
- ☐ **Day 2:** Acts 1:4-11
- ☐ **Day 3:** Acts 1:12-14
- ☐ **Day 4:** Acts 1:15-20
- ☐ **Day 5:** Acts 1:20-26
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 48

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With the Holy Spirit's power, believers spread the gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:4-8).

4 While he was with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise. "Which," he said, "you have heard me speak about; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days." 6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Jesus's Resurrection Was Only the Beginning

The book of Acts, namely, the Acts of the Apostles, detailed the beginning of the church. The book was written by Luke, the author of the Gospel with his name. Luke's Gospel, written to the most excellent Theophilus, focused on the Lord's earthly life and ministry. As something of a part two, the book of Acts detailed the spread of the church through the power of the Holy Spirit. In fact, Acts is the greatest resource we have on the early church and its growth. Written once again to Theophilus to explain what happened after Jesus's resurrection, Acts literally began right where Luke's first book ended.

After His resurrection and prior to His ascension, Jesus regularly met with His disciples over a period of forty days (Acts 1:3). In preparation for His departure, Jesus gave the disciples one last message as

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motivation and guidance for the ministry they would undertake. Jesus did not leave His disciples—or us, for that matter—without clear-cut missional instructions.

Jesus commanded the disciples to remain in Jerusalem and await the fulfillment of the Father's promise (v. 4). What promise was that? Luke recorded John the Baptist as saying: "I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I am is coming. I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:16). Unlike John's Gospel, Luke never specifically described Jesus's discussing the coming of the Spirit (see John 14:26), but Luke did mention the hope of the Holy Spirit's help throughout his Gospel (Luke 11:13; 12:12; cf. 24:49). Furthermore, many see the promise conveyed through the prophets (Isa. 44:1-5; Joel 2:28-32). In either case, the disciples were well aware of Jesus's reference in Acts since He had taught on the outpouring of the Spirit several times.

It is common to detail the workings of the Godhead as the Father sent the Son and the Father and Son sent the Holy Spirit. Though the triune God is perpetually at work in His creation, Scripture frequently emphasizes certain roles of the Godhead within redemptive history. In the church age, Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father. That is not to say, however, that Jesus isn't active in salvation. The pointed reference to the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:4-5 is meant to highlight His unique role in the work of salvation, not imply the complete absence of the Father and the Son in the gospel mission.

Jesus highlighted the distinction between John's baptism and that of the Holy Spirit (v. 5). John's baptism was a continuation of Jewish ceremonial

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"God's Spirit is fully a person with all His own individual traits. He speaks, inspires, guides, convicts, comforts, and encourages—all functions an individual personality might perform. Jesus always referred to Him in that light. He used the personal pronouns He and Him, but never the impersonal pronoun It."[1]
–Bill Bright (1921–2003)

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washings. The Jewish faith held washing as a sign or act of repentance and forgiveness (Ps. 51:7; Isa. 1:16). The law also prescribed washing for ceremonial purposes (Lev. 15:13). These washings were significant in the life of the Jewish believer, but they were unable to remove the impact of guilt and sin upon one's soul. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is markedly different—it is a cleansing with spiritual fire. Thus, the Holy Spirit removes any deep impurity beyond the superficial power of water. John's baptism pointed to a greater work, something that would completely renew the soul. John's baptism was a foretaste of the Holy Spirit's cleansing and renewal from the stain of sin.

It is interesting that the disciples still struggled to understand their next steps. In Acts 1:6, the disciples asked Jesus a question about the restoration of the nation of Israel. Jesus, the risen Messiah, was in their midst. Surely He would do what a faithful Jewish man had always expected the Messiah to do. Yet Jesus's sights were not on the restoration of an earthly kingdom but on the establishment of a heavenly one.

Jesus gently corrected the disciples, reiterating His teaching from the Olivet Discourse (see Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32): "It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority" (Acts 1:7). The time of the second coming—when Jesus will set up His kingdom on earth—is a date determined by the Father. The disciples' role was to be mindful of the second coming but presently focused on the kingdom work at hand. To be clear, Jesus neither denied nor belittled the idea of restoring Israel. Rather, as a wise teacher, understanding the bigger picture, He showed that His work on the cross has widened the scope of restoration. As John B. Polhill

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wrote: "In short, to speculate on times and dates is useless. The Lord's return does not revolve around such speculation but around God's own purposes, and those purposes embrace the salvation of the world."[2] Jesus was revealing that the disciples' focus was too narrow. The gospel's implications spread far beyond the ethnic descendants of Abraham to "every nation, tribe, people, and language" (Rev. 7:9). The disciples were to be strategic leaders in spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Yet they would not do so in and of their own power but with the guidance and empowering of the Holy Spirit.

What comfort do you receive in knowing that the Holy Spirit is with us as we complete Christ's mission?

The Spirit Is Crucial to the Spread of the Gospel

The theme in Acts 1:8 has reverberated throughout Christian history. It's a statement of fact, a clear depiction of the call placed upon the apostles' lives and the mission they would fulfill. The beauty of this verse is only magnified when one considers the scandal such a declaration was to the original hearers. Until this point, the apostles had been looking at the work of God through a small keyhole. Jesus just unlocked and opened the door.

Jesus first asserted that those who receive the Holy Spirit "will receive power" (v. 8). The Greek word for "power" is *dynamis*, from which we get "dynamite" and "dynamic."[3] When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, they would be empowered with a supernatural ability. Through this power, the disciples would be enabled by God to accomplish the very mission Jesus

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set before them. The heart of Jesus's statement is that the disciples were incapable of achieving this mission alone. They needed to have divine help and strength.

Of course, this supernatural empowerment would not be the capability to do just anything but specifically to accomplish the gospel mission. To be direct, the power God gives is meant to accomplish God's work. Just as Jesus's ministry began with His baptism (Luke 3:21-22), so too would the ministry of the apostles. This time, however, the baptism would be with the powerful Holy Spirit.

Jesus did not give a direct command or a suggestion in Acts 1:8. Again, He stated what would happen in the future: "You will be my witnesses." The disciples would spread the gospel of Jesus Christ as eyewitnesses of His death and resurrection. Unlike Christians today who believe based on their testimony, the apostles had firsthand experience of Jesus's teachings and miracles. Their testimony coupled with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit added a unique ingredient to the beginning of the gospel movement. These men not only would testify to what they had "seen and heard" (4:20), but most also would be killed for the faith. According to tradition, of the apostles listed in Acts 1:13, only John would die a natural death. But of course, during John's ministry, he too suffered greatly for the Lord (Rev. 1:9).

The call to be a witness of Jesus is not a call to comfort or ease. It is a life of devotion that will involve hardships along the way. The Greek word for "witness" is *martys*, from which we get our English word "martyr."[4] Thus, the suffering endured by those called to be witnesses for Christ has been enshrined with a status befitting those who give their lives.

GOSPEL Connection

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to empower us to continue His mission, knowing He would ascend into heaven and one day return.

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Jesus was very specific regarding the spread of the witnesses' ministry. They would be heralds "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Here Jesus provided a prophetic map foretelling how the gospel mission would spread. First, in Jerusalem, which was where the disciples were currently located, and eventually, as Luke records, to the ends of the earth (13:47).

Many see this prophetic map as a template for gospel ministry by the local church. They use Jesus's description as a model for missional engagement: local community (Jerusalem), state or province (Judea), country (Samaria), and around the globe (to the ends of the earth). As a general model, this is a very helpful template for the church. More broadly, Jesus's depiction of the spread of the gospel showed that salvation was not just for the Jews. Tony Merida wrote:

> Christians have no tribal deity. We have a Savior who loves and died for the nations! That means that we must relinquish any prejudices that keep us from sharing him faithfully. We must repent of any ethnocentrism or unconcern for unreached peoples. Jesus sent ordinary people to the nations, just as he sends us.[5]

The beauty of Jesus's commission for His church is not only its depth but its width. His kingdom's boundaries extend well beyond one people or one nation. Any local church rightly committed to the gospel work will be a church engaged in spreading the gospel all over the world.

What are some ways believers help to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth?

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As we wait for Jesus's return, we live united in prayer with other believers (Acts 1:9-14).

9 After he had said this, he was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 While he was going, they were gazing into heaven, and suddenly two men in white clothes stood by them. 11 They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven." 12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem—a Sabbath day's journey away. 13 When they arrived, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. 14 They all were continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Jesus Ascended and Will Return

Acts 1:9 is the only place Jesus's ascension was described in Scripture, though it was declared or assumed in other places. There really is no ambiguity in the text: Jesus was elevated into the sky via supernatural action. Luke wrote that "a cloud took him" (v. 9). Though the description should be understood as a historically accurate depiction, many also point out the significance of the "cloud" within Scripture, such as the cloud that guided the Israelites and rested on the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34) and the bright cloud that appeared at Jesus's transfiguration (Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:34). A cloud was commonly used to

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depict the presence of God. Of course, God is omnipresent, present everywhere and at all times. However, there are occasions within Scripture when God reveals His presence in a special way. Theologians commonly call such a physical manifestation of the presence of God a *theophany*. Undoubtedly, this was a beautiful picture of the Father taking the Son to assume His rightful place in the throne room of heaven.

As Jesus ascended, "two men in white clothes" appeared with the disciples (Acts 1:10). It is generally understood that these "men" were angels. White clothing was commonly a sign of angelic beings (Matt. 28:2-3). Angelic activity is frequently used as an important marker within redemptive history. At this momentous juncture between the earthly ministry of the Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit, two heavenly beings gave the disciples a word of hope that encourages Christians to this day: Jesus will come again.

This future return of Christ must not be downplayed as merely a spiritual occurrence within the hearts of Christians. The heavenly messengers were direct: "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Though we know neither the day nor the hour (Matt. 24:36), we can be confident in the promise. The second coming of our Lord will take place "in the same way" that He ascended. Though we don't know when or how, we know Jesus will bodily, physically, and literally return one day. This passage should not be understood as some sort of wish fulfillment; it is a promise given to us by God. If this promise were false, so too would be Christianity.

THEOLOGY Connection

GOD THE SON: Jesus was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God, where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. Jesus will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission.

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Theologians call the study of the end times *eschatology*. The return of our Lord is an eschatological hope that has been the longing of Christians since Jesus's ascension. In fact, early Christians commonly prayed, "*Maranatha*," which means, "Our Lord, come!" (1 Cor. 16:22). In the meantime, though we await His sure return, we do not remain idle, "looking up into heaven" (Acts 1:11). We have a commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:20). Furthermore, we have a purpose in this eschatological interlude. We, the church, are called to worship Christ and encourage others to do the same. As John Piper said: "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't."[6] The admonishment of the angels pushed the followers of Christ to adopt a "now, but not yet" attitude. We understand that Christ can return at any time, yet we carry on with the gospel mission until that blessed day arrives.

How can believers help one another prepare for Jesus's return?

As We Wait, We Unite

The ascension happened on the Mount of Olives, "a Sabbath day's journey away" (Acts 1:12), roughly three-fourths of a mile. Jesus had given one of His most popular sermons there, called the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24). This message foretelling His second coming was communicated at the site of His ascension. Such a circumstance leads some to claim that the Mount of Olives is the specific location where Jesus will return. Regardless, nothing about Jesus's life and teachings was mere coincidence.

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Upon their return to Jerusalem, the eleven remaining disciples went to the room where they likely shared the Lord's Supper with Jesus the night before His crucifixion. In Acts 1:13, Luke listed the apostles in almost the same order he did in Luke 6:14-16. It is commonly assumed that Peter, John, and James were listed first due to their position among the apostles.

During the ten days between the ascension and Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit would be sent, the Eleven, along with Jesus's mother, brothers, and certain female disciples, were "continually united in prayer" (Acts 1:14). Three spiritual principles follow from this passage.

First, prayer precedes great movements of God. It is upon the fertile grounds of devout prayer that the Lord frequently produces a bountiful harvest. The disciples knew God was about to use them as witnesses to the nations. In preparation for this responsibility, they engrossed themselves in prayer. Second, the Great Commission must be bundled with prayer. To truly fulfill the Great Commission, Christians must not only declare the gospel, we also must pray. The two go hand in hand. Third, the disciples' prayer was intentional and specific. "Continually united in prayer" (v. 14), this devotion was an intense time of communion with the Lord, the One to whom they prayed. The followers were engaged together in business with the Lord.

It is common within our American mindset to focus on "getting the job done," which is helpful in maintaining dedication to a specific task. The danger with such a mindset, however, is that we neglect the groundwork for doing the job right. If we are to follow the example of the disciples, the gospel mission and work must be preceded by prayer. Prayer cannot be seen as a trivial

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"Prayer is not a sign of doubting but is a witness to our certain hope and confidence, since we ask the Lord for things that we know he has promised. So it is right for us, too, following the disciples' example, to pray faithfully that he will increase his Holy Spirit in us."[7]
–J. I. Packer (1926–2020)

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exercise to check off one's to-do list. Prayer is the work of the Christian. It is what we do. Prior to the start and proliferation of the church, the dedicated followers of Jesus spent ten days in perpetual and deep prayer. Present-day followers of Christ should not only take note of this profound act, we should follow suit.

What results have you experienced from ongoing unified prayer with a group of fellow believers?

HEAD

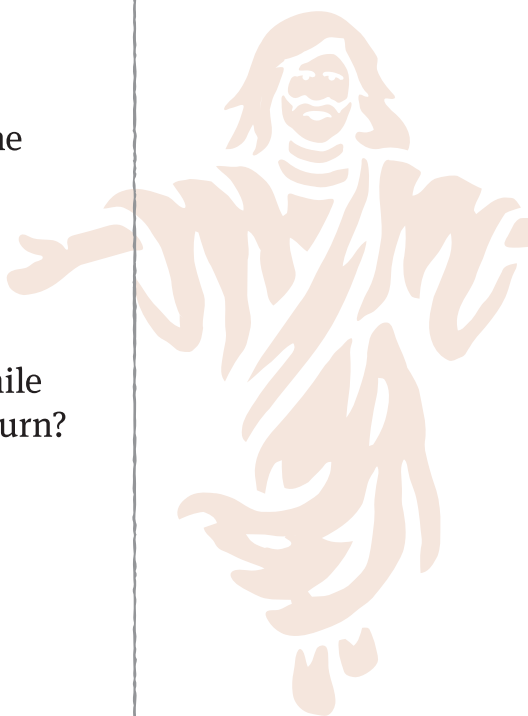
Why do we need the Holy Spirit to accomplish the mission Jesus has given His disciples?

HEART

How can we live, serve, and share the gospel while being mindful to wait expectantly for Jesus's return?

HANDS

How will you pray with others this week for the salvation of lost loved ones?



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UNIT 29 • SESSION 2

THE SPIRIT FILLS US

CORE PASSAGE: ACTS 2:1-6,14-21

Context: Before ascending to heaven, the risen Jesus gave His followers a mission to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). But before their mission began, they were instructed to remain in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit empowered them. As they waited, the disciples prayed together on a regular basis (v. 14). Peter emerged as their leader, and they chose a man named Matthias to replace Judas as the twelfth apostle (vv. 15-26). The stage was set for the day of Pentecost as Jesus's disciples awaited the extraordinary outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Key Concept: The Holy Spirit empowers and emboldens His people for kingdom mission.

DAILY READINGS

- ☐ **Day 1:** Acts 2:1-13
- ☐ **Day 2:** Acts 2:14-21
- ☐ **Day 3:** Acts 2:22-36
- ☐ **Day 4:** Acts 2:37-41
- ☐ **Day 5:** Acts 2:42-47
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 134

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The Holy Spirit empowers us to be kingdom people (Acts 2:1-6).

1 When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying. 3 They saw tongues like flames of fire that separated and rested on each one of them. 4 Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them. 5 Now there were Jews staying in Jerusalem, devout people from every nation under heaven. 6 When this sound occurred, a crowd came together and was confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

Prepared for a Harvest at Pentecost

Pentecost, the Festival of Weeks or of Firstfruits, was one of the three main feasts in the Jewish year (Lev. 23:15; Deut. 16:16). Initially a time of commemoration and celebration for the start of the harvest, this festival took place fifty days after Passover. During the first century, however, it became a festival celebrating the giving of the Mosaic Law.[1] Many faithful Jews traveled to Jerusalem to partake in this festival, which was why "devout people from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5) were in Jerusalem at this time. This is not surprising, given what followed on this particular Pentecost celebration. God strategically ordained and used a gathering of Jews from all over the known world to spread the gospel throughout the Roman Empire.

Luke mentioned that the disciples "were all together in one place" on the day of Pentecost (v. 1), no doubt praying and doing what they had been doing for

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the previous ten days since Jesus's ascension (1:12-14). We are not told which disciples beyond the Twelve were present, but most scholars presume the number was about one hundred and twenty men and women, as mentioned in Acts 1:15.

Though a common translation of verse 1 is "When the day of Pentecost had arrived," a literal translation of the Greek word for "arrived" could be "fulfilled." Luke may have intentionally used such language to indicate a new kingdom focus for the day of Pentecost.[2] The New Testament consistently teaches that the Old Testament system of sacrifices and festivals was a foreshadow of what was to come. The fulfillment was the initiation of a greater covenant, one established by Christ and fueled by grace (Heb. 8:6). Christians today remember Pentecost as a day of "firstfruits" in a spiritual harvest that eventually will be worldwide and people-wide.

Though what occurred at Pentecost was a spiritual event, the manifestations of the Spirit's outpouring also correlated to bodily senses: sight, sound, and speech. Humanity's limitations often require that we describe supernatural events in natural terms. So God's compassionate condescension to our limitations inclined Him to manifest that which is spiritual in physical ways. Though wind cannot be seen, it most certainly can be felt and its effects heard. Fire is seen, heard, and felt. Both the wind and the fire at Pentecost were physical demonstrations of a profoundly new spiritual reality.

While gathered together, the disciples heard "a sound like that of a violent rushing wind" that "came from heaven" and "filled the whole house where they were staying" (Acts 2:2). Perhaps this was something

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like the roaring of a tornado. In Greek, the word for "wind" is the same word for "spirit." God's activity, and the Spirit's in particular, was compared to wind at other times in Scripture (Job 38:1; Ezek. 1:4; John 3:8). Such language not only indicated what was actually happening, but the wind signaled to the disciples that this was not a natural phenomenon. Something divine was happening, something the Father and Jesus had promised, something the prophets foretold.

In conjunction with the "violent rushing wind" (Acts 2:2), "tongues like flames of fire" also rested upon the disciples (v. 3). The promised new baptism "with the Holy Spirit and fire," heralded by John the Baptist in Luke 3:16, had arrived. The disciples were not simple spectators of this extraordinary event but were the blessed recipients of this divine outpouring.

Jesus told His disciples at the last supper that the Holy Spirit would cause them to remember what Jesus had taught them (John 14:26). As the Holy Spirit moved through them at Pentecost, they quickly understood they were experiencing the long-awaited divine baptism as a fulfillment of Scriptures. It was as if Old Testament prophecies came alive in that moment.

The subsequent behavior of the apostles, now influenced and empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit, was so bizarre by normal standards that skeptics in the crowd that gathered around them thought they were drunk (Acts 2:13). The disciples' response to the Spirit's presence, however, was not erratic, uncontrolled, or wacky. Whatever they experienced, they did not act like maniacs.

The filling of the Holy Spirit empowered the believers "to speak in different tongues" (v. 4). No shortage of ink has been spilled in discourse of opinions and

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Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"The day of Pentecost was that moment in redemptive history when God unlocked the power of the Holy Spirit and gave it to His church, not just for those who were gathered there, but to the church of every age and to every Christian throughout time. That wind, that fire, is as much for us today as it was for those gathered in the upper room."[3]
–R. C. Sproul (1939–2017)

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interpretations regarding the "gift of tongues." The early church fathers spoke little on this phenomenon. Our earliest extra-biblical account comes from Irenaeus (c. 120–200), who wrote that speaking in tongues was a gift of speaking in foreign languages to advance the gospel message and that the gift was still present in his day, though rare.[4] The most direct understanding of this passage is that the gift of tongues is the supernatural ability granted to a believer to speak in languages previously unknown to the speaker yet known to a hearer. This ability was a supernatural tool to spread the gospel before translation apps and foreign language courses. The purpose of the gift is evangelism.

Why might we overlook the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

THEOLOGY Connection

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN: The Spirit's work in the life of a Christian begins with the work of salvation in bringing a person to faith in Christ and is continued through the work of sanctification in helping the Christian to become progressively more like Christ throughout the course of his or her life. (cont.)

Empowered by the Spirit for Harvest

In Acts 2:5, Luke described devout Jews from all over the known world who had come to Jerusalem for the festival. Confused by the sound of the violent wind and the proclamations in tongues, a crowd gathered around the disciples—a perfect scenario for the first gospel sermon (v. 6). In something like a reverse of Babel (see Gen. 11:1-9), the gospel was proclaimed in a language everyone could understand—their own, despite the numerous languages represented among the crowd.

At the tower of Babylon, God confused the people's singular speech in order to force them to spread over the face of the earth as He had commanded (cf. Gen. 9:1). At Pentecost, God gave understanding to the masses so that He could gather them under the

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banner of Christ. At Babylon, the people pridefully attempted to approach God by their own strength and ingenuity. At Pentecost, God did what humankind could not: He came in their confusion and drew them to Himself.

The gift of tongues enabled the disciples to spread the gospel to those who would have been unlikely to hear it otherwise. The ability to communicate the gospel message to those of other nations and tongues exponentially initiated the gospel mission. This same mission takes place today. Perhaps the Spirit manifests the work differently, but the same Spirit empowers believers to accomplish the same mission. The Holy Spirit compels, enables, fuels, and sustains the gospel of Christ to the ends of the earth. Without the Holy Spirit, all gospel declarations would be "babble" to the lost. The Holy Spirit calls the Christian to proclaim and calls the sinner to Christ.

How have you experienced the Holy Spirit's empowerment for works of service or sharing the gospel?

THEOLOGY Connection

(cont.) He also empowers and indwells believers, intercedes on their behalf, and equips them with special gifts for the service of God's kingdom. He is the Comforter to the believer and aids us in properly interpreting the Bible.

The Holy Spirit emboldens us to speak so people may hear the gospel, believe it, and be saved (Acts 2:14-21).

14 Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them, "Fellow Jews and all you residents of Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and pay attention to my words. 15 For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it's only nine in the morning. 16 On the contrary, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 17 And it will be in the last days, says God, that I will pour out my Spirit on all people; then your sons and

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Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to learn more about Peter's life before and after Pentecost.

your daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. [18] I will even pour out my Spirit on my servants in those days, both men and women and they will prophesy. [19] I will display wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below: blood and fire and a cloud of smoke. [20] The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and glorious day of the Lord comes. [21] Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Emboldened by the Holy Spirit

To clarify what was happening, Peter "stood up," along with the Eleven who had witnessed the death and resurrection of Jesus (v. 14; cf. 1:21-22). Jesus had specifically chosen these men to lead the church after His ascension. Their God-given authority and ministry began at Pentecost. Indeed Peter—the disciple who had previously denied the Lord (Luke 22:54-62)—was empowered by the Spirit to preach the first Christian sermon.

Peter's first task was to correct the skeptics' misunderstanding: the disciples were "not drunk . . . since [it was] only nine in the morning" (Acts 2:15). Public displays of intoxication were heavily frowned upon. The likelihood of a large group being publicly drunk at nine in the morning during a holy festival was low. Instead, Peter argued that a prophecy was being fulfilled right before their eyes.

Old Testament prophets foretold a time when God would pour out His Spirit in a new way (Ezek. 36:22-27; Joel 2:28-32). First-century Jews anticipated a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies during the time of the Messiah. D. A. Carson said when "the prophetic

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Spirit falls upon the church, mediating God's presence . . . , this is understood to be nothing other than what God himself had promised in Scripture."[5] Peter seized the moment to declare the truth. It was the dawn of a new day, the beginning of a new way. God no longer imparted His Spirit to a few for a specified time; now the Spirit is abundantly, permanently poured out on all who trust in the Lord.

In his sermon, Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32 directly. The prophet Joel called the people of Israel to repent after a plague of locusts struck the land. If the people turned back to God, their land and lives would be restored by a special outpouring of the Spirit. Joel's prophecy also promised a restored age in which the Messiah would renew His people. Peter preached that Joel's prophecy had come to pass. Mediated by Christ's sacrifice and sealed by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, all who draw near to God in faith receive salvation and spiritual renewal.

Who are some believers you admire as examples of Spirit-empowered boldness for Christ?

The Firstfruits of a New Harvest

Remember that the baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost does not mean the Spirit was inactive prior to the New Testament. He has always been very active, both in creation and in God's redemptive plan. At Pentecost, the new covenant was inaugurated by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on each follower of Christ. Stephen Wellum stated, "The new covenant raises every member of the new covenant to the same relationship with God, through the universal distribution

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"For the Spirit of the Lord filleth the world . . . [W]hat nature is it becoming to assign to Him who is omnipresent, and exists together with God? . . . Shall we not then highly exalt Him who is in His nature divine, in His greatness infinite, in His operations powerful, in the blessings He confers, good? Shall we not give Him glory?"[6]
–Basil of Caesarea (c. 330–379)

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of the Spirit."[7] The triune God has every right to apportion the Spirit as He sees fit. Yet in His compassion and grace, He now gives His Spirit to all who repent of their sins and trust in Jesus as their Savior. Thus, all Christians have the Spirit within them. This doesn't mean all Christians easily discern or understand the voice or guidance of the Holy Spirit. That, however, is one important aspect of sanctification. Spiritual growth tends to strengthen spiritual discernment.

Peter proclaimed that the Spirit will enable "sons and . . . daughters" to prophesy, "young men will see visions," and "old men will dream dreams"—even male and female servants "will prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18). Though these specific signs may not have been experienced at Pentecost, the book of Acts is replete with such occurrences. Indeed, these spiritual gifts are magnified during this period. These gifts of the Spirit ignited the gospel expansion and the growth of the early church.

Each of these phenomena, except for dreaming dreams, occurred in various places within the book of Acts: prophesying (11:28; 15:32; 21:8-14) and visions (7:55-56; 9:3-9; 10:9-16). It is certainly possible that visions and dreams closely, if not explicitly, overlap. Scripture links both visions and dreams in Genesis 46:2 and Daniel 1:17. Jacob's dream in Genesis 28:10-22 may have been a vision given in a dream. Hence, it is possible that visions and dreams are one in the same. Additionally, the early believers understood that not all dreams were messages from God; only unique dreams carried such divine directives. This doesn't mean visions and dreams were always concurrent, but they could be. Either way, the presence of the Spirit endowed believers with

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particular supernatural abilities. These gifts were divine workings for a divine purpose. This purpose guided the church in accomplishing the mission of salvation.

There are two general interpretations of Acts 2:19-21 (cf. Joel 2:30-32): fulfilled and unfulfilled. Some New Testament scholars believe that Joel's prophecy was fulfilled at the crucifixion of Jesus. According to F. F. Bruce, the heavenly wonders were recorded in Luke 23:44-45, "It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three, because the sun's light failed."[8] Other scholars understand these passages as referring to future events at Jesus's second coming. It is a confusing passage to be sure.

Peter's Scripture quote in Acts 2:21, however, was clearly immediately applicable: "Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Though salvation is fully realized at the second coming, Scripture still speaks of Christians as saved (Acts 16:31). In fact, the apostle Paul, also quoting Joel 2:32, used the same passage to emphasize a present reality (Rom. 10:13). So whatever is made of the heavenly displays in Acts 2:19-20, verse 21 indicates that whoever "calls on the name of the Lord" is saved. Of course, it is also possible that verses 19-20 are meant to be merely symbolic, but that would be strange given that the context and surrounding verses in Peter's sermon are not understood as merely symbolic.

Whether we prefer an interpretation of future or present fulfillment, there are three spiritual principles we can learn in these verses.

First, judgment awaits. Throughout Scripture, blood, fire, and smoke are seen as divine judgments upon those living in disobedience. Perhaps that is

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why Peter included this section of the passage: He was emphasizing the need and opportunity for his listeners to escape the judgment of God rather than highlighting signs in the heavens.

Second, God is sovereign over creation. He uses creation for His glory and purpose. It is implied in verse 20 that God darkened the earth and turned the moon to blood (or turned it into a blood-red color). Given God's creative, providential, and sustaining power over the universe, it is not surprising that He uses creation for His purpose and plan. While it is normal for God to uphold a steady consistency within nature, He is also keen on using unique miraculous demonstrations that point to greater things.

Lastly, the Lord is a God who saves. As paradoxical as it may sound, the Lord is a God of judgment and of salvation. In fact, it is common within prophetic history to assert God's coming judgment in conjunction with His compassionate salvation for all who repent (Isa. 1:16-20; Jer. 3:12-14; Ezek. 18:30-32). Peter's use of Joel 2 appealed to the hearts of his hearers to repent of their sins and turn to God for their salvation. If nothing else, Peter used the passage as just that—a call to salvation.

How can we recognize when the Holy Spirit is drawing someone to receive salvation in Christ?

GOSPEL Connection

God's plan was always to redeem and rescue His people, filling them with His Spirit and calling them His own so that they may go out and bless the nations through the gospel of salvation.

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HEAD

What evidence of the Spirit do you detect in your own life right now?

HEART

In what situations do you hesitate to speak about Jesus and need the Holy Spirit's help?

HANDS

What are some ways your group could serve together in your church and community?



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UNIT 29 • SESSION 3

GOD EMPOWERS US



CORE PASSAGE: ACTS 3:1-16

Context: The church was born at Pentecost by the Holy Spirit. In the weeks that followed, believers established what daily life entailed for Spirit-filled disciples of Jesus. They visited one another's houses, met one another's material needs, and participated in both large- and small-group church meetings. Prayer and studying the apostles' teachings were central (Acts 2:42-47). Miraculous displays of God's power occurred among the church through the apostles (v. 43). The first of more than a dozen miracles in Acts was accomplished through Peter and John in Acts 3.

Key Concept: God works through His people for His glory and the spread of the gospel.

DAILY READINGS

- ☐ **Day 1:** Acts 3:1-10
- ☐ **Day 2:** Acts 3:11-26
- ☐ **Day 3:** Acts 4:1-4
- ☐ **Day 4:** Acts 4:5-22
- ☐ **Day 5:** Acts 4:23-31
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 9

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God's works lead us and others to praise and glorify Him (Acts 3:1-10).

1 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple for the time of prayer at three in the afternoon. 2 A man who was lame from birth was being carried there. He was placed each day at the temple gate called Beautiful, so that he could beg from those entering the temple. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter the temple, he asked for money. 4 Peter, along with John, looked straight at him and said, "Look at us." 5 So he turned to them, expecting to get something from them. 6 But Peter said, "I don't have silver or gold, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!" 7 Then, taking him by the right hand he raised him up, and at once his feet and ankles became strong. 8 So he jumped up and started to walk, and he entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God. 9 All the people saw him walking and praising God, 10 and they recognized that he was the one who used to sit and beg at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. So they were filled with awe and astonishment at what had happened to him.

Believers Were Devoted to Prayer

The Christian faith sprouted from the Jewish faith; its roots are deep in the Old Testament covenants. In fact, the first believers were Jews. Luke revealed that the early believers "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). The apostles taught that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law, the Messiah whom Jeremiah taught would bring a new, better covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). Additionally, Luke made it

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clear that the believers daily "devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house" (Acts 2:46). Their devotion to prayer continued in the Jewish custom with one major alteration: they offered their prayers in the name of Jesus, the resurrected Savior.

Acts 3 indicates that the disciples of Christ still attended daily prayers at the temple. Prayers were offered at the temple three times a day: sunrise, afternoon, and sunset. Formal temple prayers were not an extemporaneous time of supplication and petition; rather, they were directed prayers guided by the psalms. The Jews used the book of Psalms as their prayer book.

With this in mind, consider that Peter and John went "up to" the temple at three in the afternoon to pray (Acts 3:1). It isn't clear why Peter and John were the only disciples going to temple prayer. Perhaps the other disciples were already there, or perhaps they had prior engagements. Either way, why did Luke state that they went "up to" the temple? This was a common way of referencing travel to the temple. It may simply have been an idiom of the time, but it also may have acknowledged a reverence for temple worship. In either case, this was a standard description of approaching the temple.

The disciples approached at three in the afternoon, the second hour of daily prayer, which also was the time for the afternoon sacrifice (Ex. 29:38-39). Peter and John still found organized prayer a significant spiritual practice. These prayers likely took place in the Court of Israel, an inner courtyard for Jewish men.[1] At the temple, the two disciples encountered a man "who was lame from birth" (Acts 3:2). Though we know the

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handicap inhibited the man from walking, we do not know the full extent of his predicament. This man had neither money nor means. He was destitute and had been such since his first breath. Every day he was carried to the temple, though we do not know by whom. At this time in history, the distinction between destitution and sufficiency was a knife's edge. Begging was an option of last resort. If temple worshipers were unwilling to give, the beggars would die. Luke stated that the lame man was "at the temple gate called Beautiful" begging for money every day (v. 2).

The second temple was a marvel of first-century architecture, beautiful and truly an impressive structure, even by today's standards. The temple served one main purpose: worship. It was the most holy and important place of worship in all the Jewish faith. Every day men and women worshiped at the temple. During seasons like Passover and Pentecost, temple worship was especially busy. Jewish worship consisted of three basic forms of discipline: prayer, sacrifice, and tithe. The disciples of Jesus, of course, no longer had a reason for animal sacrifice. Jesus had given the once-for-all sacrifice by offering His life for many (Heb. 10:10-14). Prayer, however, was another matter. Prayer was not only an essential act within Jewish worship but within new covenant worship as well. And during the second hour of prayer, Peter and John encountered the man at the temple entrance.

The temple had five main gates. It is generally believed, though, that the Beautiful Gate was the most lovely and the main entrance to the temple proper. Josephus described it as finer and more beautifully crafted than the others.[2] Fittingly enough, many would beg at the temple gate, affording the worshipers

Notes

PLACE Study

THE TEMPLE: The church that began in Jerusalem was comprised of Jewish followers of Christ. They met together in the temple (Acts 2:46) and participated in prayer times at the temple (3:1). But they did not rely on temple sacrifices to atone for their sins. Jesus's followers relied on His sacrificial death alone to atone for their sins (Heb. 10:1-18). Meeting in the temple would have been a convenient space for gathering as well as to engage others with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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Notes

the opportunity to practice alms-giving. Alms-giving was an important part of temple worship and commanded in the Mosaic Law: "For there will never cease to be poor people in the land; that is why I am commanding you, 'Open your hand willingly to your poor and needy brother in your land' " (Deut. 15:11).

Very likely, this lame beggar was not pleasant to the senses. He probably looked ragged, smelled horrible, and the sound of his begging may have been a nuisance. His physical limitations disqualified him from entering the temple proper for worship. From all outside appearances, there was nothing special about this man. Yet he had a main role in this subsequent event. In fact, his life serves as an archetype for us all.

Luke wrote, "When he saw Peter and John about to enter the temple, he asked for money" (Acts 3:3). Of course, the disciples were no men of means. They were simple Galileans, probably living on a meager income as fishermen. Some have speculated that John came from a wealthy family given a probable status and inclusion with the religious elite, [3] but the Gospels never explicitly labeled John as such.

Peter and John's response to the beggar's request was, "Look at us" (v. 4). The poor beggar likely did not look passersby in the eye. Temple worshipers would have looked at him with pity or perhaps a sense of superiority. The Jews often believed congenital diseases such as blindness, deafness, or lameness were a punishment for one's own sin or the sin of one's family (John 9:1-2). While these are a condition of our fallen world, Jesus taught His disciples that sickness and brokenness came about "so that God's works might be displayed" (v. 3). Still, this lame beggar's condition highlights something far more drastic and spiritual.

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This man's condition represented all who have "sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). He was an archetype for all the broken, the hurt, the lame, the destitute. In our sin, we too are outside the temple looking in. We too are disconnected from God because of our fallen condition. Yet just as Peter and John had something to offer the paralyzed beggar, we too have been given a gift from God.

Peter and John Offered What Mattered

Peter's reply to the impaired man has come to epitomize the Christian faith. What Peter and John had to offer was only that which had been given to them: Jesus Christ. Peter told the beggar: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!" (Acts 3:6). What is surprising is that the beggar didn't ask, "Who is Jesus?" He may have heard of Jesus. It's possible he had seen Jesus. In either case, Peter extended his right hand to the man and helped him up (v. 7). Immediately, the man had the ability to walk, and the first thing the lame man did was enter the temple. Luke emphasized the emotion of the situation. The healed man "jumped up and started to walk, and he entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God" (v. 8). This man who had never walked now jumped to his feet with the help of Peter. This man received far more than he expected. He wanted enough coin to survive the day. Yet his life was physically and eternally changed.

What helpful methods have you discovered for recognizing and meeting people's true needs?

This is an exquisite picture of regeneration. Regeneration is a spiritual act of God that we experience as being "born again" (John 3:3). At regeneration, our

GOSPEL Connection

When God works in the world through His people, He desires that it leads to faith in Christ, understanding that salvation is through Christ alone.

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lives are made new. Though our sins are many, we are made white as snow (Isa. 1:18). Just as this man needed a miracle to walk, so we need a miracle to be saved. This miracle is an analogy of what Jesus does for all who reach for Him.

As with most biblical miracles, this one was very public. Everyone around saw this man healed (Acts 3:9), and as a result, "they were filled with awe and astonishment at what had happened to him" (v. 10). Such a sight drew a crowd and gave Peter an opportunity to share the good news.

What works of God have you witnessed that led you to praise and glorify Him?

All miracles and acts of God should point to Christ and the message of the gospel (Acts 3:11-16).

11 While he was holding on to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astonished, ran toward them in what is called Solomon's Colonnade. 12 When Peter saw this, he addressed the people: "Fellow Israelites, why are you amazed at this? Why do you stare at us, as though we had made him walk by our own power or godliness? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and denied before Pilate, though he had decided to release him. 14 You denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer released to you. 15 You killed the source of life, whom God raised from the dead; we are witnesses of this. 16 By faith in his name, his name has made this man strong, whom you see and know. So the faith that comes through Jesus has given him this perfect health in front of all of you.

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Peter Spotlighted Jesus

Solomon's Colonnade was a covered portico area of the temple along its eastern wall. It was a common teaching location for Jesus (John 10:23) and early believers (Acts 5:12). Upon seeing the lifelong paralytic healed, a crowd gathered around Peter, John, and the healed man. Like any good preacher of the Word, Peter did not let a good crowd go to waste. He used the opportunity to share the gospel.

Peter's first order of business was to draw attention away from himself and direct it toward Christ. He asked, "Fellow Israelites, why are you amazed at this? Why do you stare at us, as though we had made him walk by our own power or godliness?" (3:12). God used Peter and John as conduits to bring about this miracle, so the power and work did not come from Peter and John themselves. This was a complete and total act of God. Peter quickly made sure the crowd knew what really happened.

In what followed, in standard Hebraic style, Peter drew the line of redemptive succession from Abraham to Jesus (v. 13). The God who called Abraham is the same One that "glorified" Jesus. Though likely not immediately evident to our ears, such a claim was equivalent to bluntly stating that Jesus is the long-awaited and promised Messiah. This miracle of healing the paralytic confirmed Jesus's resurrection power. As shown in Acts 2, God performed unique works to demonstrate the truth of Jesus's ministry and to make opportunities for the spread of the gospel mission.

Peter did not mince words. He was direct and pointed. He accused the surrounding crowd of handing Jesus over to Pilate for execution (v. 13). By

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such action, they "denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer released" in His place (v. 14). Peter referred to Pilate's proposal to release either innocent Jesus or a notorious murderer named Barabbas (see Luke 23:13-25). The crowd chose to free the murderer and to execute "the Holy and Righteous One" (Acts 3:14).

This is the only time we see such a title given to Jesus. The most obvious way to understand such a term is as a tag of deity. The title "Holy One" was used extensively in the Old Testament in reference to God, but it also was used as a title for the coming Messiah (Ps. 16:10; cf. Acts 2:27). Additionally, Jesus was called "the Holy One of God" in the New Testament (Luke 4:34; John 6:69), each time as a designation of Jesus's special and divine status. "The Righteous One" also was a title used in reference to God (Isa. 24:16). To use those terms to refer to Jesus would have been quite scandalous to pious Jewish ears, yet the designation of Jesus as "the Holy and Righteous One" is truthful.

What should we learn from Peter's preaching to this guilty crowd?

Peter Called People to Repent

Peter also used the phrase "the source of life" in reference to Jesus (Acts 3:15). "Source" also could be translated as "originator" or "pioneer." The ramifications of such a title should not be overlooked. Since Jesus is the source of all living things, then He is the Creator of all. Since Jesus is "the source of life," then He is God. Peter charged the crowd with having "killed" the source of life. We do not know if the people in the temple were the ones who shouted for Jesus's death

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(Luke 23:13-23). Nonetheless, by implication of our sinful nature, we are all guilty.

Given our fallen nature, we all are deniers of God. Apart from God's grace, we all stand guilty. The sin of Jesus's executioners is no less blameworthy than ours. You and I were not there on the day of Jesus' death, but we are no more innocent. We all stand condemned. We all need forgiveness. Just as the disfigured beggar, we are unable to approach God due to our sin and guilt. Yet we know all of that is wiped away for those who have faith in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

Peter was quick to couch the guilt of his hearers as an act of "ignorance" (Acts 3:17), but the charge still applied. Their act of ignorance did not justify or lessen their rejection and murder of the Messiah; they were still guilty. The sin within them, and in us, led to a horribly evil act, the worst act in the history of the universe—the death of the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

But Peter also was clear that Jesus was raised from the dead by God. As if his hearers were skeptical of such a claim, Peter insisted that he and John were "witnesses" of Jesus's resurrection (v. 15). The apostle Paul wrote that the resurrected Christ was seen by over five hundred witnesses (1 Cor. 15:6), some still alive at the time of Paul's letter (c. AD 55-56). Jesus's resurrection was not something that took place in a vacuum. He appeared before people, ate with people, and taught His followers in a risen, glorified body.

Peter used the credibility that he just received through the healing of the crippled man to testify to his interaction with the risen Lord. Furthermore, the resurrection verified that Jesus is "the source of life" (Acts 3:15). Christian philosopher William Lane Craig highlighted the importance of the resurrection:

Notes

THEOLOGY Connection

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH: The church is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen King Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the Spirit and make disciples by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the glory of God and the good of the world.

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> Without the belief in the resurrection that Christian faith could not come into being. The disciples would have remained crushed and defeated men. Even had they continued to remember Jesus as their beloved teacher, his crucifixion would have forever silenced any hopes of his being the Messiah. The cross would have remained the sad and shameful end of his career. The origin of Christianity therefore hinges on the belief of the early disciples that God had raised Jesus from the dead.[4]

If the resurrection is false, so is Christianity (cf. 1 Cor. 15:12-19). The crowd, having just witnessed the healing of a lifelong paralytic, heard Peter's proclamation that the power for this healing came from Jesus Christ—the One who died and rose from the grave.

Faith in Jesus healed this man. Peter stated that "the faith that comes through Jesus has given him this perfect health in front of all of you" (Acts 3:16). Scholars disagree whether the faith that healed the lame man was the faith of Peter and John or the faith of the beggar. In either case, the healed man gave glory to God for the miracle.

God is capable of many great miracles such as this, but the spiritual lesson here is not really the physical healing. The focus, rather, is the spiritual healing God offers through Jesus. Spiritual healing only comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is not a product of will power; it is by the grace of God. For all who are broken by sin, forgiveness and renewal await all those who believe in Jesus.

If someone asked you how Jesus has changed your life, what would you say?

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"It is not every sinner that is justified. It is the believer in Jesus . . . By faith the sinner appropriates to himself the work of Christ, and becomes vitally united with him."[5]
–James P. Boyce (1827–1888)

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HEAD

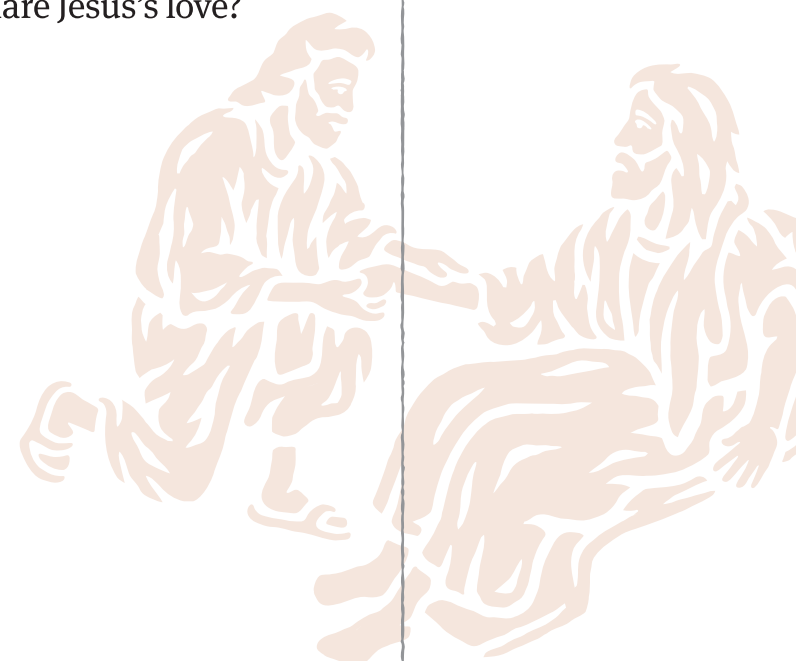
Why do you think we are tempted to live like God no longer intervenes in the world?

HEART

What is the state of your heart toward giving Jesus the glory He deserves?

HANDS

How will you serve others this week and show you are motivated by a desire to share Jesus's love?



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UNIT 29 • SESSION 4

GOD PROTECTS US

CORE PASSAGE: ACTS 5:17-32

Context: After Pentecost, the message about Jesus spread rapidly. Three thousand people were saved the day the church was born (Acts 2:41), and new believers were added to the church daily (v. 47). But the fury of opponents spread rapidly too. To some the gospel was "an aroma of death leading to death" (2 Cor. 2:16). That was true of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. When Peter and John healed a man lame from birth and followed the healing with preaching about Jesus, they were arrested by the Jewish authorities (Acts 3:1–4:22). Once released from imprisonment, however, their gospel witness intensified, as did the persecution.

Key Concept: Though persecution may come, God's people must remain diligent in spreading the gospel.

DAILY READINGS

- ☐ **Day 1:** Acts 4:32-37
- ☐ **Day 2:** Acts 5:1-11
- ☐ **Day 3:** Acts 5:12-16
- ☐ **Day 4:** Acts 5:17-32
- ☐ **Day 5:** Acts 5:33-42
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 143

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God's mission in spreading the gospel will not be thwarted (Acts 5:17-24).

17 Then the high priest rose up. He and all who were with him, who belonged to the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. 18 So they arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. 19 But an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail during the night, brought them out, and said, 20 "Go and stand in the temple, and tell the people all about this life." 21 Hearing this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. When the high priest and those who were with him arrived, they convened the Sanhedrin—the full council of the Israelites—and sent orders to the jail to have them brought. 22 But when the servants got there, they did not find them in the jail; so they returned and reported, 23 "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing in front of the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside." 24 As the captain of the temple police and the chief priests heard these things, they were baffled about them, wondering what would come of this.

The Gospel Spurs Jealousy

The gospel was spreading. People were miraculously healed, and lives were saved and radically changed. The religious leaders, however, weren't happy with the powerful teaching of the apostles nor the miraculous healing of the sick and the lame. The apostles faced adversity from the start. Jesus promised such trials would happen (John 15:18-25). The apostles were not deterred though. Jesus had given them a mission (Acts 1:8), and with the Holy Spirit, they were determined to accomplish it.

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Notes

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The high priest was the leading religious figure in Jerusalem at the time. His role and voice commanded respect and authority. If he became upset, he was a force to be reckoned with. Luke wrote that the high priest and the party of the Sadducees were "filled with jealousy" and so "rose up" against the apostles (5:17). The Sadducees were one of the three leading parties of Jewish religious leaders. There was always political positioning between these three groups. The Sadducees, though not as large as the Pharisees, were the party that made up the ruling or elite class of Jewish leaders. The Sadducees only adhered to the Torah (or the first five books of the Old Testament). Additionally, they claimed there was "no resurrection, and neither angel nor spirit" (23:8).

Caiaphas, the high priest at the time, was in power between AD 18–36, an extremely long tenure as high priest. The high priest held a lifelong office; however, the Romans commonly removed the high priest to prevent an uprising anytime there was tension between the Jewish nation and the Roman authorities. The fact that Caiaphas had not been removed likely meant he was in good rapport with Pontius Pilate.[1]

Luke indicated that jealousy drove Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin to have the apostles arrested and put in jail (5:17-18). Peter and John had been arrested previously for annoying the Sanhedrin with their preaching about Jesus's resurrection (see 4:1-22). With this second arrest, the religious leaders were jealous. The apostles were drawing large crowds and gaining new believers. Luke didn't go into the details of the jealousy, but it is noteworthy that he mentioned the motivation behind the arrest. The apostles weren't arrested simply because the Sadducees disagreed with their

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teaching but because they were winning the favor of the people.

Sometimes we may look at jealousy as a private, personal sin that hurts no one other than ourselves. The testimony of Scripture, however, never presents sin in such a way. Sin's nature is to kill and destroy. Sin—whatever sin it may be—impacts both the person sinning and those around them. If jealousy takes root, it can cause significant harm. The Sanhedrin's jealousy not only affected their own hearts, it led them to harass Jesus's disciples. The followers of Jesus threatened their hold on power and ability to control the people.

It is possible the religious leaders feared a rebellion or uprising against the Romans among their fellow Jews. Considering the verbiage being used to describe Jesus ("ruler," "Savior," "Lord"), it isn't surprising the ruling elite would want to stifle any revolt before it started. Yet Luke didn't claim the members of the Sanhedrin were nervous that the Romans would feel threatened and violently repress any possible insurrection. Luke highlighted their jealousy. Most likely the Jewish leaders were jealous of the influence and popularity the disciples of Christ were amassing. Of course, Jesus's disciples weren't spreading the gospel to gain power or control. Their mission was to grow the kingdom of God, not a kingdom of man.

The night after the apostles' arrest, the Lord sent an angel to open the doors of the jail and let them out (5:19). It is fitting that "an angel of the Lord" ("messenger" in Greek) released them since the Sadducees did not believe angels existed. As something of a divine mockery of their incredulity, God sent what they rejected as validation of the apostles' teaching.

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Voices from THE CHURCH

"The Christian faith is not a private faith. Remember, Jesus was crucified publicly—for all to see. His humiliation could not have been more complete were his execution carried out in the middle of a shopping mall during the holiday season. And after he rose, showing himself to many witnesses, he then commissioned the church to spread his fame publicly. . . . This, we see, results in hostility."[2]
–Tony Merida

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Yet the angel didn't free the apostles so they could flee to a safe harbor; rather, he commanded them, "Go and stand in the temple, and tell the people all about this life" (v. 20). In full submission to the divine mandate, Peter and the apostles went right back to the temple at daybreak (v. 21). God granted them freedom, but not for their own personal benefit. Their lives—indeed, their very freedom—were dedicated to the Lord's service and mission. Their dedication is inspirational for all Christians that follow. Their focus was not on personal safety but on obedience. Despite the likelihood of recurring persecution, they faithfully and passionately continued with the task God had set before them.

When have you seen a follower of Jesus remain diligent in their witness through persecution?

Also important in the apostles' rescue is the nuance of the command the angel gave to the apostles. He told them to go tell people "about this life" (v. 20). The angel's command was doubly impactful. First, the word used for "life" recalls its use in John 11:25, where Jesus told Martha that He is "the resurrection and the life," as well as its use in John 14:6, where He stated He is "the way, the truth, and the life." The apostles' first priority was to preach Jesus as the source and truth of all life. Jesus is the path to God. He alone reconciles humankind to God. In claiming "Jesus is life," at the very least, His followers proclaim that Jesus is the way to eternal life, but claiming Jesus as the source of life goes deeper.

Second, Jesus offers us true life. He does not simply give us life everlasting; He makes it so all who follow Him can live the life God intended here and now. Scripture never teaches that salvation is merely about

GOSPEL Connection

God's people spread the good news of Jesus Christ because that was Jesus's mission, that all may repent and know salvation through Him. But as with Christ, faithfulness can come with the cost of persecution and suffering. Yet we continue sharing because of our love for people and obedience to God with the help of the power of the Holy Spirit.

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eternity. It is that, to be sure, but it is more. We are saved now, saved to live as God calls us to live. No longer slaves to sin, followers of Jesus Christ can live in the freedom and joy Christ offers. Thus, the apostles' message was that the greatest source of human flourishing is found in Jesus alone.

The Gospel Cannot Be Thwarted

The high priest and his compatriots were so disturbed by the apostles' message that they "convened the Sanhedrin" (Acts 5:21). The Sanhedrin consisted of seventy priests, mostly Sadducees, and the high priest was the seventy-first member. These men oversaw not only the practices and beliefs within the religion itself but also governed the Jewish people, something of an autonomous senate of the Jews. It wasn't unusual for the Sanhedrin to convene, but it wasn't something done haphazardly either. It is telling that the disciples' message was so effective so quickly as to garner the attention of the religious elite. The high priest and religious leaders were clearly upset and nervous that this movement would get out of hand.

The Sanhedrin ordered the apostles be brought to them. But of course, the servants wouldn't find them in the jail—they were in the temple declaring the good news of Jesus (vv. 22,25). The jail cell was still locked. The guards were still standing "in front of the doors," completely oblivious to what had occurred in the night (v. 23). We are not given the specific details of the jailbreak, but presumably, the jail guards neither heard nor saw the release of the prisoners. As far as they were concerned, the apostles were secure. This miracle "baffled" the leaders (v. 24). Even "the captain of the temple police" had no explanation for the missing

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prisoners. The leaders' minds spun with where such an event would lead.

The Sadducees were willing to accept any explanation of the current events other than God's miraculous power. Just like religious skeptics, they were unwilling to submit to the reality of what was happening right in front of them. Admitting that God was working these mysterious events would undermine their authority and power. The dominion of Jesus tends to upset power-hungry, worldly rulers.

What results have you seen from a follower of Jesus remaining diligent in their witness through persecution?

God's people remain steadfast in obedience to Him (Acts 5:25-32).

25 Someone came and reported to them, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple and teaching the people." 26 Then the commander went with the servants and brought them in without force, because they were afraid the people might stone them. 27 After they brought them in, they had them stand before the Sanhedrin, and the high priest asked, 28 "Didn't we strictly order you not to teach in this name? Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." 29 Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than people. 30 The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had murdered by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted this man to his right hand as ruler and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

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The Gospel Overrides Lesser Authority

It must have further amazed the religious leaders that the apostles did not flee for their lives. Not only did the apostles not run into hiding, they went right back into the temple as they had been commanded (v. 25). Open-air preaching was common at this time. In fact, it was a standard teaching method for rabbis. Yet it wasn't the public proclamation that frustrated and angered the religious leaders, it was the message they declared and the following they garnered as a result.

The "commander," or captain of the temple police, along with the "servants" again were commissioned to retrieve the apostles (v. 26). Luke didn't tell us if these guards were Jewish or Roman. There were Roman soldiers who offered protection and security at the temple. There also were Jewish guards who supplied the same service. Either way, these men were under the authority of the Sanhedrin. Since the apostles were now escapees, the commander was obligated to retrieve them. But intimidated by the crowd, the guards were civil in requesting the apostles accompany them back to the Sanhedrin (vv. 26-27). F. F. Bruce commented:

> No force was used, but no resistance was offered. Had the apostles been minded to stand their ground, they could have relied on the support of the crowd that was listening to them and the temple officials would have been faced with an awkward situation; thanks to the apostles' restraint, there was no breach of the peace.[3]

Standing before any authority figure can be terrifying. If nothing else, it must have been surreal for the apostles to be standing before the high priest a second

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time. The high priest questioned the apostles, asking: "Didn't we strictly order you not to teach in this name? Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood" (v. 28). The apostles' reply to such charges provides Christians with a succinct lesson regarding human authority and Christian obedience. Peter's response to their question was well-tempered and profound: "We must obey God rather than people" (v. 29). His response was similar to what he said in 4:19-20 the first time he and John were arrested: "Whether it's right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." The apostles were bound by a higher authority than the Sanhedrin, and they could not disobey God.

All earthly authorities, whether civil or religious, have limitations. As believers, we are commanded to respect and submit to civil magistrates (Rom. 13:1-7) and church leaders (Heb. 13:17), but there are limits. If an earthly authority ever tells us to do something contrary to God's Word, we are under no obligation to obey. All human authority is subservient to God's authority because God is greater than all.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus told the apostles they would be His witnesses. He gave them a mandate to accomplish. The angel who freed them from the jail also commanded them to declare the truth of Jesus. Anyone, whether Sanhedrin or Roman, who told them to disobey the direct and clear command of Christ, they were obligated to resist. This is why throughout history, some human authorities felt threatened by Christianity. In Christianity, man does not have the last say. God's Word is final. We are obligated to obey the Lord.

THEOLOGY Connection

EVANGELISM: It is the duty and privilege of every Christian and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all thus rests upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. (cont.)

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In Acts, the apostles constantly were threatened and harassed by those opposing the gospel message. Many told them to be silent, yet they obeyed God and continued to spread the gospel. This cost many of them their livelihoods or their lives. Still they continued to preach the redemption and forgiveness Jesus offers.

What obstacles sway you off course in your quest to be Jesus's witness?

The Gospel Produces Boldness

The Sanhedrin may have summoned the apostles, but they soon found themselves to be Peter's captive audience. Despite their warnings to stop preaching, Peter boldly told the religious leaders that the "God of our ancestors raised up Jesus" (5:30). The apostles were not declaring a new religion completely disconnected from the Jewish faith. They were proclaiming the fulfillment of the Mosaic Covenant. Their message was that the Messiah had come. Any separation from the old covenant was due to its fulfillment in Christ, not its destruction. As Kevin Vanhoozer stated: "Nothing looks quite the same in the afterglow of resurrection: God, human beings, the best plan of salvation, the cosmos itself—all need to be rethought."[4] The apostles had come to understand the old covenant more clearly after Jesus's death and resurrection, and they relayed the truth clearly to the council.

Again, Peter confronted the mostly Sadducee-controlled Sanhedrin with a doctrinal truth opposed to their precepts: The God whom they claimed to worship raised from the dead the One whom they had killed (v. 30). Peter used a strategic phrase to describe the execution of the Lord: The religious

THEOLOGY Connection

(cont.) The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle.

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leaders "had murdered by hanging him on a tree." Deuteronomy 21:22-23 stated that all people hung on a tree are cursed by God. Paul referenced the same understanding of atonement in Galatians 3:13 by stating that Jesus was hung on a tree to become a curse for us. Though killed for supposed blasphemy, Jesus became a curse for us so that we might be redeemed. Now, because of the work of Christ, all who repent of their sins and believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ will be saved. The punishment we deserved—death—was satisfied in Christ. The debt we owed was paid by the blood of Jesus.

Peter further proclaimed the resurrected Christ had been exalted to the right hand of God as "ruler and Savior" so that He might "give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31). The clear implication of this was that the Man the religious leaders had killed was the very One who had come to rescue them. In other words, the religious elite, who had longed for the Messiah to appear, were the ones who killed Him, fulfilling God's plan so that they and all who believe may be saved. The very suffering the Jewish leaders imposed upon Jesus was for them, if they would believe, and for all who trust in His sacrifice.

Just as with the crucifixion of Christ, God turns suffering into an opportunity for sanctification. For Christians, suffering is not pointless. The greatest tragedy in human history was the greatest gift for all creation. Just as the most evil act in history was a display of the greatest act of love, so God can turn great human suffering into a glorious opportunity for spiritual growth.

How have you seen suffering serve as a tool for spreading the good news?

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"Though beheaded, and crucified, and thrown to wild beasts, and chains, and fire, and all other kinds of torture, we do not give up our confession; but the more such things happen, the more do others and in larger numbers become faithful and worshippers of God through the name of Jesus."[5]
–Justin Martyr (c. 100–165)

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The apostles were not simply declaring a message shared with them. They had seen with their own eyes and heard with their own ears Jesus's miracles and teachings. They witnessed His death on the cross and touched His resurrected body. They watched Him ascend to heaven. And they were the benefactors and eyewitnesses to the coming of the Holy Spirit. These trustworthy witnesses could not and would not be silent.

HEAD

Why do testimonies of faithfulness amid persecution encourage us to be bold witnesses?

HEART

How might God use our prayers for persecuted believers to strengthen our own faith?

HANDS

What steps will you take to address your fear of sharing Jesus with others?

References

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UNIT 29 • SESSION 5

THE WORLD HATES US

CORE PASSAGE: ACTS 6:8-15; 7:54-60



Context: Jesus warned His followers they would be persecuted (Matt. 24:9). That warning became a reality with intensifying waves of opposition. First, Peter and John were imprisoned for preaching Jesus and then threatened and released (Acts 4:1-22). Later, all twelve apostles were arrested, flogged, and released (5:17-40). Now a servant full of the Holy Spirit—Stephen—was about to face the most severe persecution to that point.

Key Concept: Believers persevere against persecution as we live like Christ to the very end.

DAILY READINGS

- ☐ **Day 1:** Acts 6:1-7
- ☐ **Day 2:** Acts 6:8-15
- ☐ **Day 3:** Acts 7:1-16
- ☐ **Day 4:** Acts 7:17-53
- ☐ **Day 5:** Acts 7:54–8:3
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 140

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God will give us wisdom through His Spirit to endure persecution (Acts 6:8-15).

8 Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.
9 Opposition arose, however, from some members of the Freedmen's Synagogue, composed of both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, and they began to argue with Stephen. **10 But they were unable to stand up against his wisdom and the Spirit by whom he was speaking.** **11 Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God."** **12 They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; so they came, seized him, and took him to the Sanhedrin.** **13 They also presented false witnesses who said, "This man never stops speaking against this holy place and the law.** **14 For we heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us."** **15 And all who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw that his face was like the face of an angel.**

Stephen Was Called to Serve

The church was rapidly expanding. The growth was so massive that the apostles encouraged the church to select godly, faithful men to serve as deacons (see Acts 6:1-6). Some claim Stephen and Philip the Evangelist (not apostle), two of the first deacons, better reflected the office of elder.[1] Either way, the chosen men would serve the widows and others in the church while the apostles continued to devote themselves to preaching. Stephen, a Hellenistic Jew, was described as "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (v. 5).

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The Spirit of God was working in unique and powerful ways. Miracles and signs were common at the start of the church. Luke wrote that Stephen was "full of grace and power" and was doing many wondrous acts through the power of the Spirit (v. 8). In addition to these acts, Stephen was defending the Christian faith against those who challenged the truth of Christ. Whether Stephen was a member of "the Freedmen's Synagogue" or not, Luke did not say (v. 9), yet a heated dispute arose between Stephen and members of this synagogue. Some speculate this may have been a synagogue of Jews who were former slaves of Rome. The membership of the synagogue was quite diverse, composed of "Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia" (v. 9). Given the diaspora, many Jews had been scattered over much of this region.

While members of the Freedmen's Synagogue argued with Stephen, none could match the wisdom given to him by the Spirit working through him (v. 10). Over and over again throughout Acts and the New Testament, we see the Holy Spirit working through individuals to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. This, however, should not be taken as minimizing the importance of education and training. Scripture testifies that God can use reason as a means to open the eyes of those opposed to Jesus (see Acts 17:16-34). Furthermore, Acts does not tell us that the Spirit imparted new information to Stephen that he had never been taught. Instead, the Spirit guided Stephen to articulate that which he had already received. We know very little about Stephen's background, but God worked through him to preach the gospel message.

Interestingly enough, Luke implied that the men of the Freedmen's Synagogue refused to believe the truth

WORD Study

DIASPORA: A Greek word meaning "to scatter" or "sow throughout," it refers to communities of Jews that were scattered throughout various nations, usually as prisoners of conquest, or exiles. When the believers were scattered due to persecution, they traveled throughout the known world finding Jewish communities and synagogues, where they preached Jesus (Acts 11:19).

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about Jesus Christ, but that does not mean Stephen was proven wrong or unconvincing. In fact, Stephen's enemies conspired against him because of the wisdom and ability the Spirit of God granted him that they couldn't refute. If you have defended a belief while being aggressively interrogated, you know the difficulty of presenting a coherent thought or idea under pressure. Yet the Holy Spirit gave Stephen the ability to articulate the truth of the risen Lord, even while under intense pressure from provocateurs (5:10).

What responses, positive or negative, have you received as you share the gospel?

Stephen Was Falsely Accused

As Christians, we will face persecution. Our enemy, Satan, seeks to undermine the advance of the gospel by any means possible. The contention with Stephen's message was so intense that members of the Freedmen's Synagogue spread lies about Stephen's message. People claimed Stephen was speaking against "Moses and God" (6:11). In reality, Stephen was showing how God used Moses to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus. Not only was Stephen speaking positively of Moses, he was reflecting accurately the purpose and intent behind the Law and the Prophets.

The underhanded lie of the Freedmen's Synagogue so stirred the people and their leaders that Stephen was physically accosted. Luke mentioned specifically that "the elders, and the scribes" were included in this riled-up crowd, incensed at Stephen's teaching (v. 12). Elders were local leaders within a synagogue. These were men who maintained and managed the ministry within a particular synagogue. The scribes

PLACE Study

SYNAGOGUE: When the Babylonians destroyed Solomon's temple and took the Jews into exile, they lacked a place to worship God. Synagogues emerged during that period as local Jewish meeting places for worship, biblical instruction, and community. Even after the Jews were allowed to rebuild the temple, the tradition of synagogues endured. Jesus attended synagogues (Luke 4:16; Mark 1:21), as did believers in Acts (9:20; 13:5; 14:1).

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were teachers and scholars of the Mosaic Law. Both of these positions were highly influential in any Jewish community. If they were angered by a supposed blasphemer, the people under their spiritual care were sure to be infuriated as well. Thus, the misinformed mob seized Stephen and took him to testify before the Sanhedrin (v. 12).

Even in the Sanhedrin, these malicious foes produced false witnesses who testified that Stephen spoke against the law and customs of Moses and claimed Jesus would destroy the temple (vv. 13-14). Of course, neither Stephen nor Jesus taught such things. But lies generally are more effective when they are hidden in some truth. Stephen wasn't preaching against the law and customs of Moses, but he did claim Jesus had fulfilled the Mosaic Covenant. The law, while given to govern the people of ancient Israel, also served an ultimate purpose—it pointed to the need for and time of a Savior. Furthermore, the false witnesses continued to perpetuate a lie that started when Jesus claimed He would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days (Mark 14:58; cf. John 2:19-22). But Jesus wasn't speaking of the literal temple; He was speaking of His own body in His death and resurrection.

The gospel is always a threat to those living in the flesh. Strangely enough, it is also hard to ignore. Stephen's message was so scandalous to the religious leaders' ears that they were willing to justify their wrong actions. They twisted and distorted the gospel message to discredit Stephen's preaching. In the end, however, their actions merely fanned the flame.

The apostle Paul stressed the idea that persecution is a way of life for those who follow Jesus: "In fact, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be

CHRIST Connection

Jesus endured persecution and suffering yet without sin and calls His followers to do the same, living with integrity and forgiveness for all so that others may see Christ in us.

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persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). Those who follow Christ will receive the same animosity Christ received. As Christians, we live with the reality that the lost world doesn't just have an aversion to the gospel message but they despise the very proclamation of Christ. The only real recourse against the proclamation of the gospel for the adversaries of Jesus is to twist, distort, and lie about the message being preached and to silence those who preach it.

In the middle of false accusations and distortions, Stephen's demeanor and witness is an example for all believers. As he was being accosted, accused, and antagonized, Stephen did not respond in kind. The manipulative religious leaders believed the end justified their unrighteous means. Stephen, however, did not reciprocate. Luke wrote that while Stephen was being accused, "his face was like the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15). Stephen's face was "aglow" as if he stood in the presence of God. It is hard to overlook the similarity between Stephen's face shining and that of Moses when he encountered God (Ex. 34:29-30). Though the declaration of Stephen as seeing God in the flesh comes well after the speech that follows this verse, it is likely that Stephen saw "the glory of God" (Acts 7:55) prior to the message he delivered.

When has the Holy Spirit given you strength to endure a difficulty that seemed insurmountable?

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Believers need not fear death for we know heaven and Jesus await us (Acts 7:54-60).

54 When they heard these things, they were enraged and gnashed their teeth at him. 55 Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven. He saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 He said, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" 57 They yelled at the top of their voices, covered their ears, and together rushed against him. 58 They dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. And the witnesses laid their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 While they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" 60 He knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" And after saying this, he fell asleep.

Stephen Shared the Gospel

Before the Sanhedrin, in his defense, Stephen delivered what is commonly called the history of salvation, presenting God's redemptive history from Abraham to Jesus (vv. 1-53). The crowd listened to his speech until he professed Jesus as "the Righteous One" (v. 52), which "enraged" his powerful audience (v. 54). They "gnashed their teeth at him," the same phrase Jesus used when describing the torment those in hell will endure (Matt. 13:42). The use of the phrase here accentuated the Sanhedrin's fury toward Stephen and the gospel message. For those who love the gospel of Jesus Christ, it may be difficult to understand how the message of Christ can instigate such animosity. Apart from God's grace, however, we all would rebel against the gospel of hope (cf. 2 Cor. 2:15-16).

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Again describing Stephen's disposition while facing the charges, Luke said that Stephen was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:55). Luke was the only New Testament writer to use such a phrase (Luke 4:1; Acts 6:5; 11:24). At this stage of the early church, such a description meant that Stephen not only experienced what took place at Pentecost, but he was fully guided and gifted by the Spirit during this encounter.

Next, Stephen "gazed into heaven" and "saw the glory of God" (7:55). This claim is so spectacular, and its historical significance must not be overlooked. In Exodus 33, Moses requested to see the glory of God (Ex. 33:18), to which God said:

> I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim the name "the LORD" before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. . . . You cannot see my face, for humans cannot see me and live. (vv. 19-20)

God then placed Moses in the cleft of a rock and passed in front of him. Seeing God's face seems to have been the pinnacle of spiritual life for the Hebrew people. The psalmist wrote: "My heart says this about you: 'Seek his face.' LORD, I will seek your face" (Ps. 27:8). If there were one spiritual height the Old Testament saints sought to achieve, it was seeing the face of God. Yet the closest the saints of old ever came was to see a manifestation of the glory of God.

Stephen, prior to his death, saw the glory of God and "Jesus standing at the right hand of God" the Father (Acts 7:55). And he proclaimed what he saw: "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man

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standing at the right hand of God!" (v. 56). The mob, of course, could not see the revelation that Stephen saw. They did, however, understand what he declared. Jesus commonly used the term "Son of Man" in reference to Himself. It was a title used for the Messiah, an allusion to Daniel 7:13. At Jesus's trial, the Sanhedrin demanded: "If you are the Messiah, tell us" (Luke 22:67). All but affirming their suspicions outright, Jesus said, "But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God" (v. 69). So the irate crowd immediately understood that Stephen claimed to see Jesus beside the Father.

Stephen's vision was superior to that of Moses. Stephen not only saw the glory of God the Father but saw the face of God the Son. The theological implication is clear: Through Christ, we now have access to God in a more intimate and profound way. Now, those who draw near to God through Jesus can see the very face of God. We likely will never experience what Stephen did in this life. But one day, based upon the promises of Jesus, all who call upon His name will see His face (Matt. 5:8; 1 Cor. 13:12; Rev. 22:4).

What spiritual practices can help us build courage to share the gospel with people who oppose it?

Stephen Was Martyred

Enraged by Stephen's supposed blasphemy, the unruly horde "yelled" as loud as they could and "covered their ears" (Acts 7:57). Doing what they could to drown out any message about Jesus, the crowd "rushed" Stephen and dragged him out of the city (vv. 57-58). Darrell Bock stated:

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> The crowd carries out the execution in traditional Jewish fashion by stoning Stephen (m. Sanh. 7.4) and doing so outside the city (Lev. 24:14; m. Sanh. 6.1). . . . [T]he fact that the temple was included in the charges might have allowed for a Jewish execution, as the Romans left administration of the temple mostly in Jewish hands.[2]

The Jews had to go through Pilate to execute Jesus, but they did not bother approaching the Romans to deal with Stephen. Like Jesus's crucifixion, Stephen's execution was certainly unjust. It is hard to overlook the almost casual nature in which this stoning took place. Introducing Saul (Paul) to the reader, Luke mentioned that the mob "laid their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul" (v. 58). Saul was not a participant in the stoning, but he clearly supported the act.

Throughout this entire event, Stephen faced death without fear, but how? The answer is Jesus. Stephen saw the resurrected Christ standing at the right hand of God (v. 56). Stephen knew that Jesus had risen from the dead, so his eternity was secure. We too can face death with peace and trust because our Lord has conquered death. Death did not keep Him, and because of His grace, it will not keep us. Stephen's confidence and security for his soul was rooted in the mercy of Christ.

As the mob was stoning Stephen, he prayed. First, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit! (v. 59). This prayer is similar to the one Jesus prayed on the cross: "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Jesus's prayer, and Stephen's, closely followed Psalm 31:5: "Into your hand I entrust my spirit; you have redeemed me, LORD, God of truth." Second,

THEOLOGY Connection

LIFE AFTER DEATH: The Bible teaches that when a Christian dies, he or she immediately is with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8; Luke 23:43). This is what some people call an intermediate state, given that the final state for believers takes place at the future resurrection (Rev. 6:10-11). For those who are not in Christ, life after death results in being separated from Christ in a state of suffering, even though future judgment remains (Luke 16:19-31).

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Stephen prayed, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" (Acts 7:60), recalling Jesus's prayer, "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). We do not know if Stephen witnessed Christ's crucifixion, but Jesus's last words were discussed among the faithful as they are today. Thus, it isn't surprising that in their final moments, the followers of Jesus would adopt His final words.

Luke's recording of Stephen's death mirrored that of Christ's, except that Jesus asked His Father to forgive His executioners before asking the Father to receive His spirit. Either way, Stephen lived like Christ lived, and he died a death like Christ died. Paul later stated: "If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord" (Rom. 14:8). Stephen's life exuded the very love and forgiveness Christ exemplified. This is a model for all Christians to follow. Stephen did not simply co-opt Jesus's final prayers as a mark of perceived piety; he offered these prayers from a heart of compassion for his executioners. He did not hate them nor belittle them. He prayed for them.

Christians will face hardships and push-back for living and proclaiming a Christian worldview. That doesn't mean, however, that our response to disparagements should resemble the language and actions of our persecutors. Our words and actions must resemble Jesus's: "When he was insulted, he did not insult in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten but entrusted himself to the one who judges justly" (1 Pet. 2:23). Christians are called to live differently than the world and to die differently. In life and in death, we are Christ's—our words and actions should reflect Jesus up to and throughout our final moments.

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"When I was young, I was afraid of the dark . . . My father knew about my fear of darkness. So, every time we came home, my dad would unlock and open the door, go inside and turn the light on. Then he'd turn around and say, 'Come on in, Steve, everything's fine.' . . . Jesus unlocked the door of eternity, went into the grave and turned the lights on for you. Now He's saying, 'Come on in, everything is fine.'"[3]

–Steve Gaines (1957–2026)

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It may seem preposterous to pray for those who despise you. Yet God said to Isaiah: "For as heaven is higher than earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:9). That which seems ridiculous to finite minds may be the very wisdom of God.

Why do we find it so difficult to love and forgive those who have wronged us?

HEAD

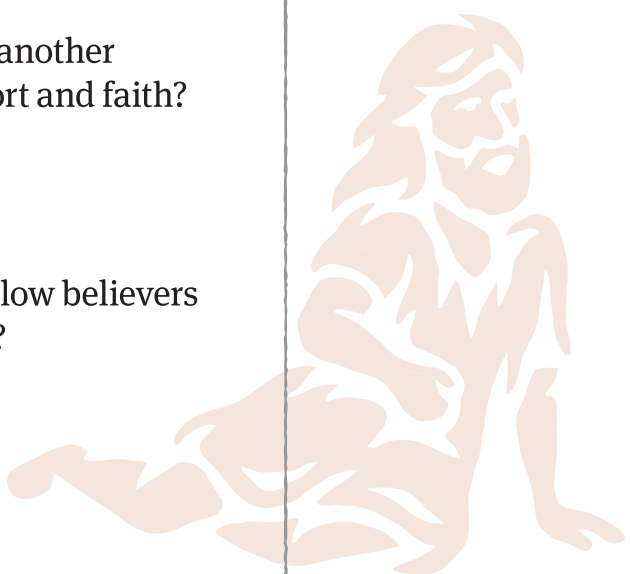
How can expecting persecution for following Jesus help us to endure it faithfully?

HEART

What are some ways we can help one another approach death with peace and comfort and faith?

HANDS

What encouragement will you give fellow believers to help them remain faithful to Christ?



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UNIT 30
THE GOSPEL SPREADS

ACTS

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Memory Verses

"He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins."

–Acts 10:42-43

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UNIT 30 • SESSION 1

THE GOSPEL IS UNDERSTOOD

CORE PASSAGE: ACTS 8:26-39

Context: Before His ascension into heaven, Jesus told His followers that upon receiving the Holy Spirit, they would be His "witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The apostles filled Jerusalem with the message of the gospel, but it took the persecution that began with Stephen's death to expand that boundary. Philip, one of the servants along with Stephen, took Jesus's commission to heart and shared the gospel in Samaria. He then was open and obedient to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to share Jesus with someone from the ends of the earth.

Key Concept: We are called to help others understand the Scriptures and see Christ in and through them.

DAILY READINGS

- ☐ **Day 1:** Acts 8:1-8
- ☐ **Day 2:** Acts 8:9-13
- ☐ **Day 3:** Acts 8:14-25
- ☐ **Day 4:** Acts 8:26-31
- ☐ **Day 5:** Acts 8:29-40
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 43

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God gives us opportunities to share the gospel, so we must obey (Acts 8:26-31).

[26] An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip: "Get up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is the desert road.) [27] So he got up and went. There was an Ethiopian man, a eunuch and high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to worship in Jerusalem [28] and was sitting in his chariot on his way home, reading the prophet Isaiah aloud. [29] The Spirit told Philip, "Go and join that chariot." [30] When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you're reading?" [31] "How can I," he said, "unless someone guides me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

God Guides Us to Divine Appointments

This passage began with an unmistakable divine initiative: "An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip: 'Get up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza' " (v. 26). Luke even noted that this was a desert road. Philip was sent away from the public fruitfulness of his Samaritan ministry (vv. 4-25) into a comparatively empty and unlikely location.

From a human standpoint, this assignment might seem foolish. Philip had been preaching in Samaria with remarkable blessing (vv. 5-13). Crowds were listening, and many people were responding. Why leave that visible success for a wilderness road? The answer is simple: because the Lord wanted him there.

The mission of the church is not ultimately guided by human efficiency but by divine wisdom. The Lord Jesus governs the expansion of the gospel from heaven.

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He sends His witnesses where He wills, when He wills, and for purposes He fully knows. Before Philip saw the Ethiopian, God already saw him. Before Philip understood why he was going, the Lord had already prepared the encounter.

We often feel pressure to create ministry opportunities by our own cleverness or personality. But this passage reminds us that evangelism begins with God's action before it ever becomes our obedience. He is already arranging circumstances, troubling consciences, awakening questions, and positioning His servants. Our role is not to control the mission but to follow the Lord of the mission.

Luke highlighted Philip's response with beautiful simplicity: "he got up and went" (v. 27). No delay, no objection, no request for additional explanation; Philip promptly obeyed. The difference between a missed opportunity and a fruitful witness is often not better insight but simple obedience.

Many Christians want God to guide them in evangelism, and rightly so. We should pray for open doors (Col. 4:3), for boldness (Acts 4:29), and for wisdom in speaking (Col. 4:5-6). But Acts 8 reminds us that guidance alone is not enough. God may open the opportunity, yet we must still go, speak, and act. We cannot pray for gospel opportunities while remaining committed to comfort, caution, and self-protection.

Philip's obedience is especially instructive because he obeyed before he knew the outcome. The Lord often leads that way. We prefer to see the whole path before we take the first step. God usually gives just enough light for obedience, not enough to satisfy our craving for control. Faith is the willingness to move in response to God's direction, trusting that He has sent us.

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Many believers are willing to obey once the risks are removed and the results are visible, but that is not usually how faith works. Faith acts on the character of God, not on the certainty of outcomes. Philip could go because the God who sent him is wise, good, and was already at work.

How does the Spirit's role in preparing both Philip and the official encourage you as you carry the gospel into your community?

God Makes Unexpected Connections

When Philip arrived on the road, he discovered that God indeed had already been at work. Luke introduced "an Ethiopian man, a eunuch and high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of her entire treasury" (Acts 8:27). This man was socially prominent, financially responsible, and spiritually curious. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home, "sitting in his chariot . . . reading the prophet Isaiah aloud" (v. 28).

Several important themes converge here. First, the gospel was already moving outward toward the nations. This Ethiopian official was not from Jerusalem, Judea, or Samaria. He represented the wider world beginning to be drawn into the saving purposes of God. Second, this man was spiritually earnest. He had traveled to worship and was reading Scripture. Yet Luke also made it clear that spiritual interest is not the same as spiritual understanding. The man was reading Isaiah, but he did not yet grasp its saving significance. Third, this scene highlights God's providence. Philip did not merely happen upon a random traveler. He found a specific man, at a precise moment, reading

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a particular part of Scripture. The Lord had prepared the setting before His servant ever entered it.

This is an important encouragement for evangelism. We rarely are the first agents in someone's spiritual story. God often begins stirring questions, exposing emptiness, awakening hunger, or creating dissatisfaction before we arrive. When we speak of Christ, we often are stepping into a work already underway. That should make us both humble and hopeful: humble because conversion does not begin with us; hopeful because the person in front of us may be much more prepared than we realize. A question, a burden, a recent loss, or a growing dissatisfaction with self-made meaning may all be ways God is preparing the soil for the seed of the gospel.

In verse 29, the Spirit told Philip, "Go and join that chariot." The divine leading became even more specific. Philip was not simply sent to a road but directed to a person, and so, "Philip ran up to it" (v. 30). Philip moved toward this opportunity decisively.

Opportunities for witness often require initiative. It is not enough to notice that someone may be spiritually open. We must go near, ask the question, start the conversation, and enter the moment. Fear, awkwardness, and self-consciousness often keep believers from doing what Philip did so naturally here. Yet the Spirit who prompts deserves to be obeyed. Philip's running is a picture of eager responsiveness. His obedience was not reluctant or grudging. It was energetic. He acted as though God's opportunity is worth immediate pursuit, and it was.

Many believers do not fail in witness because they deny the gospel; they fail because they do not move toward the opportunity God gives. They remain silent,

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hesitate too long, or wait for a moment so ideal that it never comes. Philip showed a better pattern: hear the prompting, move toward the person, trust the Lord.

It is worth noting that Philip's first move was not a sermon but a question. This is often wise in personal evangelism. Questions can uncover understanding, expose confusion, and invite honest conversation. Philip's question was gentle, direct, and rooted in the text already before them. He met the man where he was.

Philip heard the man reading Isaiah and asked, "Do you understand what you're reading?" (v. 30). This was a wise and pastoral question. Philip began with Scripture and with a question. He listened, observed, and entered the man's world by addressing what was already in front of him.

The Ethiopian's answer was to the point: "How can I . . . unless someone guides me?" (v. 31). He then invited Philip to sit with him. Though God had orchestrated the entire experience through the Spirit, Philip was invited to participate in God's work and help the Ethiopian see the truth of the gospel through the Scriptures. The same God who gave the written Word also appoints heralds, teachers, and witnesses to explain it. He uses human instruments to bring others to understanding. The Ethiopian had access to the text, but he needed help understanding it.

The Bible is sufficient, powerful, and living, mighty to save on its own, yet God still delights to use His people as instruments of illumination. He does not merely drop truth from heaven in isolation. He often sends a believer to sit beside an unbelieving person and say, "Hey, let me show you how this passage leads to Christ." That is not a weakness in God's method. It is part of His wisdom and kindness.

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THEOLOGY Connection

CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE: Because God gave us His Word as authoritative in all matters related to life and faith, we believe His Word was written in a way that can be understood with the help of the Holy Spirit. Believing the Scriptures are clear does not mean that every part is equally easy to interpret, neither does it mean we will never make mistakes in our interpretation. It does mean that with God's help, people are capable of understanding the biblical text for themselves as they employ correct methods of interpretation.

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Many people have Bibles. Many read Scripture devotionally, academically, or sporadically. Some are sincere and curious. Some know biblical languages. Some have fragments of understanding. But they still need someone to help them see the truth of the gospel through Scripture. They need a guide or a faithful witness who can show them how the Bible points to Christ.

Notice also the humility of the Ethiopian. He was an important man, yet he willingly admitted he did not understand. Pride is one of the greatest barriers to the gospel. The one who says, "I need help," is often much closer to the kingdom than the one who insists he already sees clearly. For those who teach, this is an important ministry principle. Human eloquence is no match for humble obedience as we share the gospel.

Why is our obedience to the Spirit so vital for the cause of evangelism?

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"He was not ashamed to confess his ignorance and implored to be taught. Therefore, to him who became a learner, the grace of the Spirit was given."[1]
–Athanasius (c. 293–373)

All Scripture points to God's redemption of humankind through the Savior (Acts 8:32-39).

32 Now the Scripture passage he was reading was this: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb is silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. 33 In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who will describe his generation? For his life is taken from the earth." 34 The eunuch said to Philip, "I ask you, who is the prophet saying this about—himself or someone else?" 35 Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning with that Scripture. 36 As they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, "Look, there's water. What would keep

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me from being baptized?” [38] **So he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.** [39] **When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer but went on his way rejoicing.**

Scripture Points to Jesus as Savior

In verses 32-33, Luke recorded what the Ethiopian was reading. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the prophet Isaiah envisioned a Servant who suffered innocently, bore the sins of others, was rejected, afflicted, and cut off. Yet through that suffering, He brought healing and justification to many (Isa. 52:13–53:12).

The Ethiopian was reading a passage that stands near the heart of biblical revelation concerning redemption. The themes of innocence, suffering, humiliation, and death all converge in the figure who would ultimately be seen most fully in Jesus Christ. The Servant was compared to a sheep led to slaughter and a lamb silent before its shearers. These were not merely poetic details. They evoked innocence, submission, and sacrificial suffering. The Servant suffered righteously, willingly, and redemptively.

The gospel is not an afterthought in the Bible. It is not a New Testament correction to an Old Testament story that lacked direction. Rather, the whole sweep of Scripture anticipated, prepared for, and culminated in God’s redeeming work through His Son. The promises to Abraham, the exodus, the sacrificial system, the Davidic Covenant, the prophetic hope, and notably, in this case, the Servant songs all move toward Christ.

The Ethiopian’s question in Acts 8:34 therefore made perfect sense: “I ask you, who is the prophet

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saying this about—himself or someone else?" He sensed that the passage was personal and messianic in weight. He knew the text was speaking of someone, and he wanted to know whom. When we share the gospel, we want people not merely to admire biblical literature but to ask this central question of the Bible: "Who is this about?" Ultimately, it is about Jesus.

Verse 35 is one of the most important evangelistic summaries in Acts: "Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning with that Scripture." Philip began with Scripture, and from Scripture he preached Jesus. He did not abandon the text to tell his own story, nor did he stay at the level of abstract interpretation. He started where the man was reading and showed how the text reached its fulfillment in Christ.

The small phrase "beginning with that Scripture" suggests both a starting point and a larger biblical framework. Philip likely did not limit himself to a few comments on Isaiah 53 alone. He would have traced how this passage fit within the wider redemptive plan of Scripture and the recent events of Jesus's death and resurrection. In other words, he used one text as a doorway to the whole gospel.

As Christians, we do not merely use the Bible as a launching pad for moral reflection. We proclaim Christ from the Bible. Jesus Himself taught this pattern after His resurrection, showing that Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms all testify to Him (Luke 24:27,44-47).

When Philip preached Jesus from Isaiah 53, what might he have explained? At minimum, he would have shown that Jesus is the innocent Sufferer, the silent Lamb, the One humiliated and unjustly condemned, the One cut off in death, and the One through whose

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"The instrument that Philip uses is the Word of God, not such an indescribable and imaginary word—as some 'angelic' and fanatic theologians dream—but the very same word that is contained in the Scriptures. For out of these must come all sermons, and the whole doctrine of salvation is taken."[2]
–Rudolf Gwalther (1519–1586)

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suffering salvation was secured. He would have shown that the One foretold in Isaiah is the One crucified and risen in Jerusalem. He also may have explained that Isaiah 53 does not merely describe an example of suffering to admire but a sacrifice to trust. The Servant bore the sins of others, stood in the place of the guilty, and suffered so others may be healed and counted righteous. That is the heart of the gospel Philip preached and that we share—not simply that Jesus died but He died for sinners and rose again in triumph.

All Scripture points to God's redemption of humankind through the Savior. Not every text does so in the same way, and not every passage is equally explicit, but the entire canon moves toward the person and work of Christ. The Bible is one grand story of creation, fall, promise, redemption, and consummation centered in Him. If we teach the Bible and leave people with principles but not Christ, we have not yet taught as Philip taught. Faithful Bible teaching must be Christ-centered, gospel-saturated, and redemptive-historical. We should help people see not just what the text demands but what God has done in Christ to save sinners and fulfill His promises.

How does Philip's interaction with the eunuch encourage you to read the whole Bible through the lens of Christ?

Saving Faith Responds Publicly

As they continued along the road, the Ethiopian saw water and said: "Look, there's water. What would keep me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:36). Then Philip and the Ethiopian went down into the water, and Philip baptized him (v. 38).

SCRIPTURE Note

In Acts 8, verse 37 is not included in most modern Bible translations, except perhaps as a footnote. The manuscript evidence seems to indicate this verse was a later addition to Acts, not original to Luke's authorship. This addition attempted to spell out what was already implied in the narrative, that the eunuch expressed saving faith in Jesus.

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Philip's explanation of the gospel clearly included the proper response to Jesus. The Ethiopian understood that faith in Christ leads to public identification with Christ. He did not treat belief as a merely private inward experience. He wanted to be baptized. Public rejoicing and proclamation of who Jesus is and what He has done is the proper response of faith in Christ. The Ethiopian's question may also have carried the joy of realizing that through Christ, no former barrier now excluded him. A man once marked by distance, limitation, and outsider status was welcomed into the people of God by faith in the promised Savior. The gospel did not merely inform him, it included him.

In Acts, baptism was the normal visible sign of conversion and entrance into the community of Christ. It did not replace faith, nor did it mechanically produce salvation. It was the public confession of union with Christ. To believe in Jesus is to belong to Jesus, and baptism is the God-given sign of that belonging.

The Ethiopian desired baptism. Why? Because genuine faith longs to identify with the Savior. A person may profess faith with their lips, but where faith is real, there is ordinarily a desire to obey Christ openly. Baptism is not a burden added to the gospel; it is the first step of discipleship.

After the baptism, Luke recorded, "the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer but went on his way rejoicing" (v. 39). Philip disappeared from this narrative, but the joy of the newly baptized believer remained. Faithful evangelism does not create dependence on the messenger; it directs love, trust, and worship toward the Savior. Philip's task was to point clearly enough to Jesus that the new believer could continue on in glad faith.

GOSPEL Connection

The good news of salvation can be found throughout Scripture, so as we tell the story, those who respond in faith can live in obedience and joy.

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This is a picture of missional beauty. The story that began with Philip being sent on a desert road ended with the gospel now traveling onward in the life of this new believer. The Word continued to spread.

Why is baptism an important step of faith for the new believer in Jesus Christ?

HEAD

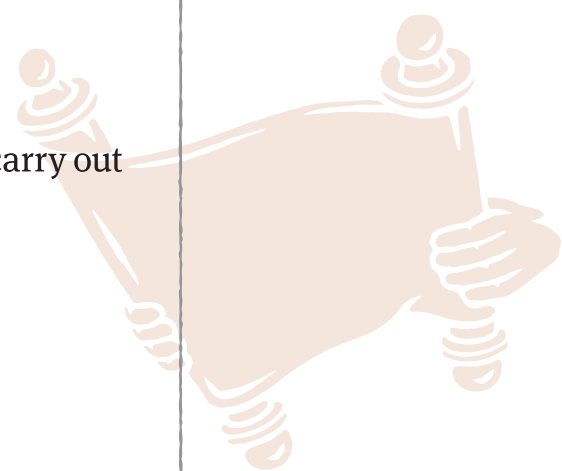
How are you intentionally growing in your knowledge of the Bible?

HEART

What keeps you from being ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you?

HANDS

What steps do you need to take this week to carry out a task the Holy Spirit is prompting you to do?



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UNIT 30 • SESSION 2

THE GOSPEL TRANSFORMS LIVES

CORE PASSAGE: ACTS 9:1-16

Context: Saul was a leading figure in the persecution of the early church. He may have been a member of the Sanhedrin or simply a zealous Jew, but he was a disciple of Gamaliel, a prominent Pharisee and rabbi in the Sanhedrin (Acts 22:3). In Philippians 3:5-6, Saul described himself as "a Hebrew born of Hebrews," zealous for the law and for the persecution of the church. He witnessed and supported the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58; 8:1). Saul then attacked the church and would "enter house after house" to "drag off men and women, and put them in prison" (v. 3). But even this persecutor of Jesus's church was a target for Jesus's redemption.

Key Concept: We are called to help people find salvation through Christ, no matter who they are.

DAILY READINGS

- ☐ **Day 1:** Acts 9:1-9
- ☐ **Day 2:** Acts 9:10-19
- ☐ **Day 3:** Acts 9:20-25
- ☐ **Day 4:** Acts 9:26-31
- ☐ **Day 5:** Acts 9:32-43
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 123

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Jesus calls all to Himself so that they may see Him and know salvation (Acts 9:1-9).

1 Now Saul was still breathing threats and murder
against the disciples of the Lord. He went to the high
priest 2 and requested letters from him to the synagogues
in Damascus, so that if he found any men or women
who belonged to the Way, he might bring them as pris-
oners to Jerusalem. 3 As he traveled and was nearing
Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around
him. 4 Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to
him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" 5 "Who
are you, Lord?" Saul said. "I am Jesus, the one you are
persecuting," he replied. 6 "But get up and go into the
city, and you will be told what you must do." 7 The men
who were traveling with him stood speechless, hear-
ing the sound but seeing no one. 8 Saul got up from the
ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see
nothing. So they took him by the hand and led him into
Damascus. 9 He was unable to see for three days and did
not eat or drink.

Jesus Exposes Spiritual Blindness

Luke began by reminding us who Saul was: "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (v. 1). This persecution of believers was not a passing mood for Saul but the settled direction of his life. His zeal was sincere, but sincerity by itself does not make a person right with God. Plenty of people are sincerely wrong. Saul was living proof. He was morally serious, religiously committed, and utterly blind.

That combination is more common than we might like to admit. We tend to assume that the main obstacle to salvation is sinful behavior in the obvious sense.

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But Saul reminds us that we can be deeply disciplined and still spiritually lost. We can know religious language, defend moral standards, and work hard for what we believe while remaining dead in sin. In fact, sometimes religion can become one more way to avoid surrendering to grace. The heart says: "I will establish my own righteousness. I will not receive one I did not earn." Saul was not irreligious. He was unconverted.

Saul went to the high priest and asked for letters to the synagogues in Damascus so that if he found any belonging to "the Way," he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem (vv. 1-2). "The Way" was an important early Christian designation. Christianity is not merely a set of ideas to admire; it is a whole new way of life centered on the crucified and risen Jesus. Saul saw this movement as a threat to be crushed.

Then everything changed: "As he traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him" (v. 3). Luke did not present this event as Saul's spiritual breakthrough after a long season of reflection. This was an interruption or an invasion. In more precise theological terms, this was a revelation. Heaven broke into Saul's carefully arranged plans. The risen Christ was not waiting passively to see whether Saul might someday become interested. Jesus took the initiative.

This is how grace works. We love to imagine ourselves as reasonable spiritual consumers browsing the shelves, comparing options, using parts of Christianity that seem useful. But the Bible gives a more serious diagnosis. Sin is not only rule-breaking, it is blindness, bondage, and rebellion. Left to ourselves, we do not simply fail to find God—we resist Him. We may resist Him through open immorality or through

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polished self-righteousness or through endless distraction dressed up as busyness. But apart from grace, we do not drift toward Jesus. Jesus must come for us.

Surrounded by blinding light, Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (v. 4). Jesus did not say, "Why are you persecuting My people?" though that would have been true. He said, "Why are you persecuting *me*?" The risen Christ so identifies with His church that to attack believers is to attack Him. Here we glimpse the profound union between Christ and His people. Jesus is not distant from His suffering church. He is not merely observing from above, taking notes. He is present with His people, united to them, regarding their pain as His own.

Saul thought he was defending the honor of God. Instead, he learned he had been assaulting God's Messiah. He thought he saw clearly. In reality, he was blind. That was one of Luke's great ironies in this passage: The man with physical sight could not see spiritual reality, and only when the man was struck blind was he finally able to see.

Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" (v. 5). Saul was confused. He knew he was in the presence of overwhelming authority, but he did not yet understand who was speaking. Then came the answer that shattered and remade his world: "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting" (v. 5). The one Saul thought was dead is alive. The One he considered cursed is exalted. The One whose followers he bound in chains is the sovereign Lord of glory.

Everything for Saul turned on that revelation. In fact, Christianity stands or falls on the reality of the risen Jesus. Saul was not converted by a vague

GOSPEL Connection

Though Jesus has ascended, He still calls people to Himself, miraculously or through other believers and the church. Jesus's mission is to redeem and rescue, but people also have a choice to follow Him or not.

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Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to learn more about Saul's life before and after his Damascus road experience.

spiritual feeling or by admiration for the ethical teachings of Jesus. He was confronted by the living Christ Himself, and when Jesus reveals Himself, false narratives collapse.

When has the Lord stopped you in your tracks and called you to do His will?

Jesus Extends Grace to the Unlikely

Jesus did not merely expose Saul's sin, He also claimed him: "Get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do" (v. 6). Jesus is not only Judge, He is also Savior and Lord. He stopped Saul on the road, but He did not destroy Saul in wrath. He redirected him. The very man who came to Damascus to drag disciples away would be led into Damascus helpless, dependent, and ready to receive instruction. Grace wounds our pride before it heals our souls, brings us low to raise us up.

Saul's companions heard the sound but saw no one (v. 7). This event was objective and real, not a private inner impression. But Saul was the one personally addressed. Then Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing (v. 8). Saul's physical blindness became a living parable of his spiritual condition. Before Christ opened Saul's eyes, spiritual blindness was Saul's true state, even when he thought he saw perfectly (cf. John 9:39-41).

The same is true for all of us apart from Christ. We are not merely a little confused, needing better information and a stronger cup of coffee. We are blind, and we cannot heal ourselves. Blind people do not reason themselves into sight. They need intervention. They need a miracle, and that is exactly what Jesus gives.

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For three days Saul was without sight, and he neither ate nor drank (Acts 9:9). The once-proud persecutor was reduced to weakness. The one who set out to command was led by the hand. Yet there was mercy in this humiliation. Jesus was dismantling Saul's old identity so that he could receive a new one. Sometimes the Lord's kindest work in our lives feels, at first, like collapse. He removes the props we trusted. He exposes the illusions we cherished. He brings us to the end of ourselves so that we might finally believe in Him.

There is also a death-and-resurrection pattern here. Three days of darkness, fasting, and helplessness anticipated the new life Saul was about to receive. Luke was showing us that conversion is not cosmetic improvement but a profound reorientation brought about by the living Christ. Saul would not become a slightly nicer version of himself. He would become a new man because he now belonged to Jesus.

This passage gives deep hope for the seemingly impossible person. If Jesus could save Saul, then no one is beyond His reach. The hardened atheist, the cynical neighbor, the self-righteous church kid, the bitter opponent, the person who spent years mocking Christianity, the person who built an identity on resisting God—none of them are outside the reach of sovereign grace. We should never minimize sin, but neither should we underestimate Christ.

This text also humbles those of us who already follow Christ. Saul's story reminds us that salvation is not ultimately the result of superior insight, moral instinct, or better spiritual taste. Jesus was merciful to us. If we see, it is because He gave sight. That truth should make Christians both deeply grateful and genuinely gentle. There is no room for swagger at the foot

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"Since he had not believed that the Lord had conquered death by rising on the third day, he was now taught by his own experience of the replacement of three days of darkness by the return of the light."[1]
–Bede (672–735)

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of the cross. The only reason any of us know Christ is that Christ first came for us (cf. 1 John 4:19).

The call of Christ is not only for dramatic persecutors on ancient roads. It is for all of us. He calls enemies and sufferers, achievers and failures, the outwardly moral and the outwardly messy. He calls us out of darkness so that we may truly see Him. And to see Him is not merely to gain information, it is to know salvation. Many of us prefer the illusion that we are basically fine, maybe a little off course, needing advice more than rescue. But Acts 9 is kinder than our illusions. It tells us the truth. We are blinder than we think and more loved than we dare imagine. Jesus knows we are stuck. Jesus knows we cannot see. And Jesus still comes. He still speaks. He still calls. And when He does, the darkness does not win.

This is the wonder of Saul's conversion, and it is the hope of the gospel: Jesus calls all to Himself so that they may see Him and know salvation—people like Saul, people like us.

Why do you think Scripture describes our sinful state apart from Christ as spiritual darkness?

We are called to help others see Jesus
(Acts 9:10-16).

10 There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." "Here I am, Lord," he replied. 11 "Get up and go to the street called Straight," the Lord said to him, "to the house of Judas, and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, since he is praying there. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and placing his hands on

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him so that he may regain his sight.” [13] “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. [14] And he has authority here from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.” [15] But the Lord said to him, “Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. [16] I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

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Jesus Calls Believers Out of Our Comfort Zones for the Sake of the Gospel

The focus of this passage shifted from Saul to Ananias, “a disciple in Damascus” (v. 10). Ananias was not introduced as an apostle, a deacon, or a famous convert. He was an ordinary believer. Yet he was an ordinary disciple whom the Lord chose to use at a crucial moment in Saul’s conversion.

God often advances His redemptive purposes through seemingly ordinary members of His church. The Lord, who could have completed Saul’s restoration directly, instead appointed Ananias to go, lay hands on Saul, and receive him. Christ saves sovereignly, but He commonly works through His people. We do not save anyone, but we get to participate in God’s saving work. He brings His people into the process, not because He needs us but because He delights to use us. By God’s grace, believers become the human face of gospel welcome, truth, and obedience in another person’s life.

Ananias’s initial response was admirable: “Here I am, Lord” (v. 10), the kind of answer that shows a heart already inclined toward obedience. But it is one thing to say we are available to the Lord; it is another thing to remain willing when His call becomes specific,

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uncomfortable, and risky. Jesus told Ananias exactly where to go and whom to find: "a man from Tarsus named Saul" (v. 11). The Lord even told him that Saul was praying and had seen a vision of Ananias coming to restore his sight (vv. 11-12). In other words, Christ was already at work on both sides of the meeting, preparing Saul and now summoning Ananias.

Ananias responded honestly: "Lord . . . I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem" (v. 13). His hesitation was understandable. Saul's reputation was terrifying. He was not just unfriendly to the church, he was dangerous to the church. Ananias knew that obedience here might feel like walking into the hands of a violent enemy. Ananias had both fear and faith, both trepidation and courage. He knew what Saul had done. He knew what Saul came to Damascus to do. He understood the risk. This was important because Christian obedience does not require pretending danger is unreal. Faith is not denial; it is trusting God in the presence of real concern.

Jesus did not cast off Ananias for his fear. He patiently assured Ananias and still used him. The Lord's answer was decisive: "Go, for this man is my chosen instrument" (v. 15). With that word, Jesus overturned human assessment. Ananias saw a threat, but Jesus saw a chosen instrument. Ananias saw a persecutor; Jesus saw a future herald. Ananias saw a man defined by his past; Jesus spoke of the purpose for which He had claimed Saul.

What an encouragement for us that no one is too far gone to be beyond God's call! Saul's sins were real, grave, and horrifying, but they were not greater than the grace of Christ. The Lord did not minimize

THEOLOGY Connection

CHRIST AS RECONCILIATION: Ever since the fall of the first man and woman in the garden of Eden, God and human beings have been estranged. Sin resulted not only in an estranged relationship with God but also in enmity between God and humanity. Sin is an infinite offense against an infinite God. (cont.)

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Saul's past, but neither did He let Saul's past have the final word. We often are tempted to believe grace has limits, at least in practice. We may affirm God's power in theory while quietly assuming certain people are unreachable, too hardened, too compromised, too public in their rebellion, or too deeply entangled in their past. Acts 9 speaks directly against that. No one is beyond hope. This does not mean every person will be converted, but it does mean we are never justified in placing someone outside the reach of God's mercy. The call of Christ is stronger than human rebellion.

Why do you think the Lord included Ananias in Saul's conversion story?

The Church Spreads God's Message

The Lord's command to Ananias was not only "Trust me about Saul," it was also "Go." Jesus intended not only to save Saul but to do so through the ministry of Ananias. The church is not an afterthought in the plan of salvation. It is God's appointed instrument for proclaiming, embodying, and extending the message of Christ. Ananias's role was profoundly important. He was called to go to the man everyone feared. He was called to become a servant of grace to someone with a terrifying history.

We all are called to help people find salvation through Christ in love, no matter who they are. That calling is often tested at the point of discomfort. It is one thing to love the receptive, the familiar, and the respectable. It is another thing to move toward the threatening, the compromised, and the deeply problematic. Yet that is exactly the direction the gospel creates in the church. Because Christ loved us

THEOLOGY Connection

(cont.) Thankfully, God loves His enemies and has sent Christ to be the reconciler between us and God. Through Christ's death, God provides the means whereby that broken relationship is restored and renewed (Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:18-19).

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while we were still sinners, His people extend love beyond the limits of natural preference and fear. We should notice the Lord did not merely tell Ananias to deliver information. He told him to go personally. The church's mission is embodied witness. It involves presence, courage, and love. God uses His people not only to speak truth but to represent Christ's welcome.

Jesus described Saul as "my chosen instrument to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites" (v. 15). The man who came to suppress the name of Jesus would carry that name. The persecutor would become the preacher. The enemy would become an instrument. God's grace pardons and repurposes. Saul's life would be redefined by the name he once opposed.

The Lord added, "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name" (v. 16). This was not punitive suffering as though Saul had to suffer to pay Christ back. Rather, suffering is the cost of belonging to Jesus in a hostile world. The former persecutor would share in the afflictions of the people he once attacked. He would learn from the inside what it meant to bear witness to Christ under pressure. Salvation is glorious, free, and full of mercy, but it also brings a person under the lordship of Christ, what we call discipleship. Saul's conversion would come with costly obedience.

Ananias knew Saul by reputation. Jesus knew Saul by election and purpose, and the Lord's will and word are ultimate. This challenges the church in important ways. We can become captive to visible history. We often know what someone has done, what they support, how they speak, or what kind of pain they have caused. Those things matter, but they do not outrank the sovereign power of Christ to save and transform. Some of the people we are most hesitant to approach

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"Satan was not going to remain quiet with Paul doing this, nor would the world yield willingly; so Luke adds that he will also be taught to bear the cross. . . . When Christ made himself Paul's teacher in this matter, he taught us that the more any of us learns in his school, the more able we are to bear the cross."[2]
–J. I. Packer (1926–2020)

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may be exactly the people Christ intends to claim. The church must therefore remain humble, prayerful, and available. We are not called to predict whom God will save. We are called to obey, love, and bear witness.

When have you witnessed someone you thought was "too far gone" give their life to Jesus?

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HEAD

What are some ways we might look to our own merit for our salvation rather than God's grace?

HEART

How can you use God's love for you as a blueprint for loving your enemies and praying for their salvation?

HANDS

How will you cultivate relationships with lost people for the purpose of helping them see Jesus?



References

1. Bede as quoted in Francis Martin and Evan Smith, eds., *Acts*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 105.
2. J. I. Packer, "Introduction," in *Acts*, ed. Alister McGrath, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), Ac 9:16.

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UNIT 30 • SESSION 3

THE GOSPEL IS FOR EVERYONE



CORE PASSAGE: ACTS 10:9-16,34-35,42-45

Context: The church began in Jerusalem with the coming of the Holy Spirit, and people were being added every day. When persecution erupted, the church was scattered and the gospel spread to Samaria, where believers received the Spirit. But Jesus said the gospel would spread even further—to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Yet when a Roman centurion and God-fearer received a message from an angel preparing him to receive the gospel (10:1-8), God also needed to prepare His apostle to share it with the Gentiles.

Key Concept: God desires all people to come to Him, showing no favoritism.

DAILY READINGS

- ☐ **Day 1:** Acts 10:1-8
- ☐ **Day 2:** Acts 10:9-20
- ☐ **Day 3:** Acts 10:19-33
- ☐ **Day 4:** Acts 10:34-43
- ☐ **Day 5:** Acts 10:44-48
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 133

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God's desire for all nations and people to come to Him may bewilder some (Acts 10:9-16).

9 The next day, as they were traveling and nearing the city, Peter went up to pray on the roof about noon. 10 He became hungry and wanted to eat, but while they were preparing something, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw heaven opened and an object that resembled a large sheet coming down, being lowered by its four corners to the earth. 12 In it were all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth, and the birds of the sky. 13 A voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." 14 "No, Lord!" Peter said. "For I have never eaten anything impure and ritually unclean." 15 Again, a second time, the voice said to him, "What God has made clean, do not call impure." 16 This happened three times, and suddenly the object was taken up into heaven.

God Spoke in a Vision

Acts 10 opened with a Roman centurion named Cornelius—a devout, God-fearing man (v. 2)—receiving a vision from an angel of the Lord: "Your prayers and your acts of charity have ascended as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa and call for Simon, who is also named Peter" (vv. 4-5). Cornelius obeyed, sending three men for this task. The next day, as they were nearing their destination, Peter went up to the roof to pray around noon, and he fell into a trance as he waited for a meal.

God often does important work in very unremarkable moments. We tend to imagine that the Lord speaks most clearly in extraordinary seasons. Sometimes He does. But just as often, He meets His people in the

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middle of normal life: a workday, a tired prayer, a restless afternoon, a moment when we are less spiritually polished than we wish we were. Peter's hunger did not get in the way of God's revelation. In fact, God used it. While Peter was waiting for a meal, the Lord prepared him for a theological lesson that would shape the mission of the church.

God is not deterred by our ordinariness. He knows how to meet us in the middle of our routines and even our distractions. He is able to turn a rooftop and a rumbling stomach into the setting for one of the most significant turning points in Acts.

In his trance, Peter saw heaven opened, and something like a large sheet descended by its four corners to the earth. The imagery is vivid and symbolic. God was revealing something Peter would never have arrived at on his own. Peter was about to be confronted with a truth that ran against instincts deeply formed over his lifetime. For his entire life as a Jew, Peter lived with categories of clean and unclean, holy and common. Those categories were rooted in God's law under the old covenant. So if Peter was going to understand the next stage of God's redemptive plan, he would need God Himself to disclose it.

God is in the business of reshaping His people according to His will. He's not concerned with our preferences; rather, He interrupts, corrects, and expands our understanding according to His Word and His saving purposes. Christian maturity is not merely becoming more sincere in our existing assumptions but allowing God to revise those assumptions as He deems necessary.

Inside the sheet that came down before Peter were all kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds (v. 12). Luke's

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point was not zoological detail but ceremonial significance. Peter immediately recognized the unclean animals. For Israel, dietary laws regarding clean and unclean foods were part of their covenant identity. Food in Israel carried theological weight, shaping habits, social boundaries, and a daily sense of belonging to the Lord. The food laws reminded the people that they were not to live as the nations lived.

Though he didn't know it yet, Peter was being confronted with the fulfillment of the entire covenantal pattern that had shaped his moral instincts for years. What once signaled faithfulness was being transformed in the light of Christ. Peter was not being pushed away from holiness here but being led deeper into the holiness of God's redemptive plan, a holiness wide enough to gather the nations in Christ.

Peter heard the command: "Get up, Peter; kill and eat" (v. 13). The command was simple, but the implication was enormous. Jesus had taught His disciples that defilement did not come from food entering the body, but it sprang from the heart, from evil thoughts, pride, lust, envy, and all the rest (see Matt. 15:10-20). Our greatest uncleanness is moral and spiritual, not ceremonial. The cleansing we need must be deeper than ritual observance. By His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus fulfilled the law and accomplished what the old ceremonies pointed toward. He cleanses sinners at the deepest level. The command to Peter was not God lowering His standards. It was God announcing that the true and final cleansing had come in Christ.

Not getting it, Peter replied: "No, Lord! . . . For I have never eaten anything impure and ritually unclean" (v. 14). His response was sincere, even reverent. He thought he was defending obedience, yet he

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Voices from THE CHURCH

"To share food and drink at a table with others is a big deal. It's a declaration of friendship, and in that way it's like declaring a covenant. As Christians we should be willing to eat with anyone. And we should receive hospitality from anyone."[1]
–Tony Merida

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misunderstood the moment. He struggled to understand how old covenant faithfulness related to the new reality established by Jesus.

Most Christians know what it is like to affirm something theologically before our instincts have caught up. We may gladly say that salvation is by grace alone but still live as if God's favor depended on our good works. We can confess that the gospel is for all peoples while still operating with subtle suspicions and social barriers.

Peter's categories were ceremonial. Ours may be cultural, political, racial, educational, or emotional. Still, the underlying issue is familiar: We all have instincts that can quietly resist the wideness of God's grace. We may not divide people into clean or unclean, but we still find ways to divide them into acceptable or questionable, easy to love or difficult to welcome.

Peter's resistance showed that gospel growth often involves having our reflexes retrained. He did not respond to God with cold rebellion but with confused faithfulness, similar to Ezekiel's response in Ezekiel 4:14. In Ezekiel's case, the Lord permitted an alternative. The Lord is patient with His people, but in this case, He was determined to make sure Peter knew that He was not negotiating. Often the Lord kindly but firmly untangles convictions, fears, and assumptions we once thought belonged together.

Why do you think God gave Peter this vision when he was hungry?

What God Calls Us Is Final

The voice spoke again: "What God has made clean, do not call impure" (Acts 10:15). Notice first that God

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acted. Cleanness is not self-produced or earned. It is granted. Sinners do not purify themselves and then present themselves to God for approval. God Himself cleanses through Christ. He justifies the ungodly, forgives the guilty, and welcomes the unworthy.

With the command "do not call impure," Peter was being warned not to contradict God's verdict. If God declared something clean, Peter had no authority to keep treating it as unclean. The Lord repeated this exchange with Peter three times to make sure it sank in (v. 16).

Though Peter did not know Cornelius's servants were already on the way, God was preparing Peter to understand that the gospel crosses ethnic boundaries because Christ has torn down that dividing wall. No one enters the kingdom of God on the strength of background, heritage, or moral tidiness. This truth liberates us because it means real outsiders can truly come in. The church is not a fellowship of the naturally fitting. It is a fellowship of the graciously cleansed.

There is a gentle warning here for the church. We may officially confess that salvation is by grace alone but still function as if belonging depends on familiarity, style, or cultural comfort. We can say Christ welcomes all who believe but then quietly reserve our deepest warmth for those who look like us, vote like us, talk like us, or carry a story we know how to handle. But the gospel keeps pressing outward. It insists that the family of God is built by divine mercy, not human similarity. Whenever we shrink the circle Christ has opened, we speak against God's verdict.

Without Jesus's saving work, Peter's vision would make no sense. But because Jesus has fulfilled the law, carried sin, and inaugurated the new covenant,

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THEOLOGY Connection

PEOPLE OF GOD: Scripture describes the church as the people of God (2 Cor. 6:16). Comprised of both Jew and Gentile, the church is created by God through the atoning death of Christ. The term "church" is used in two senses—of individual local churches composed of people who have covenanted together under the lordship of Christ and of the universal church composed of all believers in Christ in all times. As the people of God, the church seeks to live under God's ruling care while we are protected and cared for by Him.

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the people of God are now defined not by ceremonial separation but by union with Him. He cleanses the unclean, brings near those who are far off, and creates one new people by grace. Peter's vision was not ultimately about him becoming more open-minded but about bringing his instincts into alignment with the finished work of Christ. That is what this passage asks of us as well. It calls us to rejoice in the wideness of God's mercy, to repent of every instinct that narrows His welcome beyond His Word, and to rest in the cleansing that Jesus alone provides. The church is not a gathering of the naturally acceptable. It is a family of sinners made clean by grace.

What misconceptions about God's grace has the Holy Spirit had to confront you with in your walk with Him?

God doesn't show favoritism
(Acts 10:34-35,42-45).

34 Peter began to speak: "Now I truly understand that God doesn't show favoritism, 35 but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. . . . 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins." 44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message. 45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.

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God's Mission Is the Church's Mission

Cornelius's messengers arrived at the place Peter was staying, and Peter started to understand what the Lord was saying through his vision, and through the Spirit's explicit command for Peter to go with the three Gentiles who sought him out. The next day, Peter went with them to Caesarea to meet with Cornelius (vv. 17-33).

After Cornelius explained the angel's command for him to send for the apostle, Peter said, "Now I truly understand" (v. 34). While he had not fully understood the vision of the sheet before, he now realized God wasn't talking about just food. Peter, an apostle who had walked with Jesus, seen the risen Christ, and been used powerfully in the early church, needed his instincts corrected by God's unfolding purpose.

How humbling to see that it is possible to know sound doctrine and still have blind spots. It is possible to affirm the gospel in principle while not yet grasping how wide its implications really are. Peter had to learn that God's grace was not confined to one ethnic people or one covenantal culture. God was gathering a family from every nation. Peter's confession invites us to humility. Growth in grace often begins when we realize we have not understood as much as we thought.

Peter then declared, "God doesn't show favoritism" (v. 34). He did not mean that God ignores sin or that every religion leads to Him. He meant God does not base His saving welcome on ethnicity, heritage, class, or cultural standing. If salvation depended on pedigree, most of us would be shut out. But God's grace is not tribal. He does not save people because they come from the right family, nation, or background. He saves all through faith in Christ.



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That truth is both comforting and confronting. It comforts us because it means no one is disqualified from God's family on the basis of birthplace, history, or social standing. But it also confronts our pride because it means no one has an inside track to grace. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. That reality should shape not only our theology but also our posture toward others. Christians should be the people least likely to traffic in favoritism because we know we ourselves were received by mercy, not merit.

These verses remind us that the universal scope of the gospel is not a side note in the Bible. It is central to God's mission. From the promise to Abraham onward, God's purpose has been to bless all the families of the earth (cf. Gen. 12:3). Israel was chosen not as the final destination of redemption but as the people through whom the Messiah would come. Jesus did not die merely to save one ethnic group. He died and rose again to gather a people for God from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.

This means the church cannot treat evangelism, global mission, or the welcome of outsiders as optional interests for especially zealous Christians. This is not a hobby for the adventurous few. It is the very heart of God's redemptive plan. If God's mission is to gather a family from every people group, then that mission belongs to the church as well.

What is the message we preach? Peter said Jesus "is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42). That is a sobering claim. The risen Jesus is not only Savior, He is also Judge. Every person will answer to Him. This is not bad news for those who trust Him. The wonder of the gospel is that the Judge is also the One who gave

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Himself for sinners. The One before whom we must stand is the One who bore judgment in the place of His people. That is why Peter continued, "All the prophets testify about him that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins" (v. 43).

Forgiveness comes through Jesus. It comes through His name, that is, through His person and saving work. And it comes to "everyone who believes." The invitation of the gospel is gloriously wide because the work of Christ is gloriously sufficient. Everyone is saved the same way: by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

What place should the coming judgment have in our proclamation of the gospel, and why?

The Holy Spirit Falls on All Who Believe

In a world addicted to sorting, ranking, and excluding, the gospel speaks a better word. It does not flatten the seriousness of sin, but neither does it limit the reach of mercy to the respectable. Everyone who believes receives forgiveness.

"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message" (v. 44). Peter did not even finish his sermon. God interrupted it by pouring out His Spirit on the Gentile hearers. It was as if the Lord Himself was underscoring the message: These people too belong to Me.

The Holy Spirit fell upon these Gentiles while they heard the gospel being preached. The Spirit is not given apart from Christ, and Christ is not truly received apart from the Spirit. God honors the preaching of the gospel of His Son by granting the gift of His Spirit to those who believe in Jesus.

Notes

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"God has made common to the whole world the covenant of life, which he had deposited in one nation as if it were hidden treasure. And from that we conclude that this vision is of no small value for us. For when it teaches that the separation between Jews and Gentiles was only temporary, it is just as if God proclaimed from heaven that he is gathering all the peoples of the world into his grace, so that he may be God of all."[2]
–John Calvin (1509–1564)

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The Jewish believers with Peter were amazed "because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles" (v. 45). Their amazement showed just how radical this moment was. The same Spirit who came upon the disciples at Pentecost had now come upon these Gentiles. Not a lesser spirit, not a second-tier standing in the church—the same gift, the same grace, the same inclusion in the people of God. This was one of the clearest demonstrations in Acts that all who believe, no matter where they come from, receive the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the gift of the exalted Christ to all His people.

We must not confuse our preferences with God's boundaries; rather, like God, we must not show favoritism. We also must remain committed to the preaching of the gospel. People are not brought into God's family by vague spirituality, a higher morality, or shared values. They are brought in through hearing and believing the message of Jesus Christ crucified and risen. The same God who opened Peter's eyes is still gathering people from every background into His family. No one is beyond His reach. No culture is too distant. No person is too unlikely. The Holy Spirit is still able to do what only He can do—open hearts, create faith, and bring sinners into the joy of salvation.

The God of Scripture is not narrow or tribal. He is the God who sent His Son for the world and pours out His Spirit on all who believe. His family is broader and more beautiful than our instincts often imagine. By sheer grace, He invites us to belong to that family and to participate in His mission of gathering it.

GOSPEL Connection

Though God began with a people He chose for Himself, they were always for the purpose of blessing the nations. Now through Christ's work on the cross, people from all backgrounds can experience forgiveness of sin and salvation through Jesus.

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Notes

What opportunities do you have for sharing the gospel with those in your sphere of influence and beyond?

HEAD

How should we reconcile the unity we have in Christ with the diversity of people who follow Him?

HEART

What are some attitudes of your heart you need to confess that keep you from pursuing all people with the gospel?

HANDS

How will you welcome as brothers and sisters in Christ those who are different from you?



References

1. Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2017), 149.
2. John Calvin quoted in Esther Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, vol. VI, Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 136–137.

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UNIT 30 • SESSION 4

THE GOSPEL IS HOLISTIC

CORE PASSAGE: ACTS 11:19-30



Context: Acts 10–11 marked a significant transition in the spread of the gospel according to Jesus's instructions. So significant that the story was told twice, once as the narrative account and once as an eyewitness report. The news of Gentiles receiving the gospel caused no small controversy among those in Jerusalem (11:1-3). Jews of the "circumcision party" criticized Peter for his ministry among the Gentiles, but after they heard about the coming of the Holy Spirit, they glorified God, concluding, "God has given repentance resulting in life even to the Gentiles" (v. 18), which also involved them in the life and ministry of His church.

Key Concept: Christians proclaim the gospel in words backed up by loving actions for others.

DAILY READINGS

- ☐ **Day 1:** Acts 11:1-9
- ☐ **Day 2:** Acts 11:5-14
- ☐ **Day 3:** Acts 11:15-18
- ☐ **Day 4:** Acts 11:19-26
- ☐ **Day 5:** Acts 11:27-30
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 70

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We all have a calling to proclaim the gospel so that more may be saved (Acts 11:19-24).

19 Now those who had been scattered as a result of the persecution that started because of Stephen made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. 20 But there were some of them, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. 22 News about them reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to travel as far as Antioch. 23 When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged all of them to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts, 24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And large numbers of people were added to the Lord.

Scattered, but Not Silenced

After Stephen was martyred (see Acts 6–7), the subsequent persecution scattered Christians, who made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, "speaking the word" (11:19). These believers had not left Jerusalem because of strategic planning, adventurous church planting goals, or a well-funded missions initiative. They had been driven out by hostility.

The church's growth in Acts often was propelled by hardship. The death of Stephen, while a terrible setback, became one of the means by which the gospel moved outward. Scripture never romanticizes suffering. But God is able to turn the enemy's attempt to thwart the gospel into a means of gospel expansion.

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

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Many Christians imagine that ministry happens when life is settled, schedules are stable, and our emotional weather is sunny. But these believers announced Christ while displaced. They carried the gospel with them into upheaval. Apparently, we do not need a perfect five-year plan in order to bear witness to Jesus. Sometimes all we need is to know the Lord and open our mouths.

Suffering can make us fearful, self-protective, exhausted, and understandably focused on immediate needs. But many of us are not being scattered by persecution. We are simply busy, distracted, tired, and occasionally inconvenienced by ordinary life. Yet how easily we become silent about Christ. We act as though being a witness to Jesus is something for a future version of ourselves—after the schedule clears, after the children sleep better, after work becomes less demanding, after we become less awkward in conversation, after we finally become the sort of Christians who always know exactly what to say. But such postponements are unimpressive in light of the believers in Acts 11, who spoke of Jesus in the middle of the disruption of their lives.

Why does God use persecution to expand the reach of the gospel?

Luke noted that at first the displaced Christians were "speaking the word to no one except Jews" (v. 19). The church's understanding of the gospel's reach was still expanding. These scattered believers were faithful as far as they understood, but they had not yet fully grasped the wideness of God's mission. This reality should make us patient with the church and humble about ourselves. God's people grow in understanding

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"In the cross and persecution of Christians, faith increases, the gospel is in full force, the hearts of Christians are kindled and prepared to suffer for Christ's sake whatever they must. The more Christians are persecuted and slaughtered, the more Christians are born."[1]
–Johann Spangenberg (1484–1550)

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gradually through the work of the Spirit. The Lord was widening the church's horizon. He was showing that the gospel is not a message to be contained within one ethnic stream but good news for the nations.

Next comes one of the most beautiful phrases in the passage: "But there were some of them, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus" (v. 20). Luke did not include the names of these Christians. They were simply "some of them." The decisive missionary movement in Antioch was not carried forward first by apostles but by unnamed believers.

The kingdom often advances through people whose names are not remembered on earth, though they are certainly known in heaven. We may quietly assume that meaningful gospel ministry belongs to the obviously gifted, the publicly platformed, or the professionally trained. Yet Acts 11 showed the church grows because regular believers proclaim the Lord Jesus.

The phrase "the Lord Jesus" at the end of verse 20 shines light on the fact that these believers were not merely offering religious counsel, moral advice, or vague spirituality. They were proclaiming a Person. They were telling others about Jesus, the crucified and risen King. Christian witness is not fundamentally the sharing of private inspiration or personal improvement tips. Christian witness is the announcement of news: Jesus came, lived a sinless life, died for sinners, rose again, and reigns forever. Not all are called to preach in the same setting. Not all are called to teach with the same skill. Not all are called to cross oceans or plant churches in major cities. But all believers are called to bear witness to Christ. The mission of God is

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not outsourced to the verbally fearless. It belongs to the whole church.

The Right Man for the Job

As the believers in Antioch witnessed to their neighbors, "the Lord's hand was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord" (v. 21). This is one of the most encouraging statements in the chapter because it keeps the cause and effect in the right order. The believers spoke, the Lord acted, and people believed. God's sovereignty does not make proclamation unnecessary, while at the same time, the power to save is not in human eloquence, strategy, or charisma. The hand of the Lord was with them, and that made all the difference.

Many of us do not feel naturally gifted at speaking about Jesus. We would rather reorganize the garage, schedule a dental cleaning, or alphabetize the pantry than initiate an awkward spiritual conversation. We fear saying the wrong thing, being misunderstood, sounding artificial, or getting that look people give when they think you are about to become inconveniently serious. Acts 11 reminds us that the power is not finally in our polish. The Lord's hand is what makes our witness fruitful.

News of what was happening reached Jerusalem, and the church sent Barnabas to Antioch (v. 22). The church did not hear of new gospel fruit among the Gentiles and respond with suspicion alone. They sent a man known for grace and stability.

When Barnabas arrived, seeing the grace of God present among the people, "he was glad and encouraged all of them to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts" (v. 23). Barnabas did not arrive looking for

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reasons to diminish what God was doing. He saw grace in action and rejoiced. Many religious people are skilled at spotting irregularities but slow to celebrate grace. Barnabas was not naïve; he was spiritually perceptive. He could see that God was at work, and his heart responded with gladness and encouragement.

Barnabas modeled the kind of pastoral wisdom that strengthens new believers rather than burdening them with unnecessary anxieties. His exhortation was as simple as it was profound: "Remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts" (v. 23). This is always the call after conversion. New believers need endurance. They need to continue with Christ. The Christian life begins by grace, and it continues by grace through devotion to the Lord Jesus.

Barnabas was the perfect disciple for this task, "for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (v. 24). He was useful to the Lord and the church because his character and his ministry fit the moment. Fruitful gospel work is not sustained merely by urgency or excitement. The church needs men and women of tested character, spiritual fullness, and deep trust in God. Barnabas was not flashy. He was trustworthy, and God is pleased to use that kind of steady faithfulness for the growth of His church. As believers spoke, as Barnabas encouraged, as the Lord's hand worked, more people were added. The mission advanced through the combined witness of the whole church.

Who has been a "Barnabas" to you in your walk with Christ, and how?

Acts 11:19-24 leaves us with a compelling picture of how the gospel spreads. It is not glamorous, but it is

GOSPEL Connection

Christ compels us to follow His example in showing love through serving others in their spiritual and physical needs. Christians follow Christ in sharing the gospel and providing for the physical needs of others.

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glorious. We all have a calling to proclaim the gospel so that more may be saved. We may speak in different places, with different gifts, and in different ways, but we all are called to make known the good news of the Lord Jesus.

This passage also gives us hope. The growth of the church does not rest finally on our brilliance but on the hand of the Lord. That means ordinary believers can be bold. We can pray, speak, invite, explain, and testify, trusting that God is able to do far more than we can see in the moment. We should expect that when the whole church embraces this calling—when ordinary saints, in ordinary places, faithfully proclaim an extraordinary Christ—more people will be saved. The Lord delights to use the witness of His people to gather more people to Himself. That is His mission. By grace, it is ours too.

THEOLOGY Connection

CHRISTIANS AND THE SOCIAL ORDER: All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. (cont.)

Along with spiritual needs, we are called to meet physical needs (Acts 11:25-30).

25 Then he went to Tarsus to search for Saul, 26 and when he found him he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught large numbers. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch. 27 In those days some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine throughout the Roman world. This took place during the reign of Claudius. 29 Each of the disciples, according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brothers and sisters who lived in Judea. 30 They did this, sending it to the elders by means of Barnabas and Saul.

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Barnabas and Saul, a Dynamic Team

Barnabas soon left for Tarsus to search for Saul, and when he found him, brought him to Antioch (vv. 25-26). This was a beautiful example of humility. Barnabas saw that the work was growing, and he knew he needed help. He wanted the church strengthened, so he went after Saul, the man whom God had dramatically converted and called for His mission.

After his conversion, Saul tried to get involved with the church in Jerusalem, but the disciples there did not believe he was a Christian (9:26). Barnabas, however, stood up for Saul and reconciled him with the apostles. Saul was accepted, and he continued to preach Christ there until some Hellenistic Jews tried to kill him (vv. 27-29). Once afraid for their own lives, the church now feared for Saul's life, so they sent him to his hometown of Tarsus (v. 30), which was where Barnabas found him before bringing him to Antioch.

Barnabas stood by Saul when others were wary of him. Now he brought Saul into one of the most important centers of mission in the early church. Gospel work flourishes when believers recognize gifts in others and gladly bring them into the labor.

If we really believe that all are called to proclaim the good news of the Lord Jesus, then we should also believe that the church needs all kinds of faithful servants. Some encourage like Barnabas. Some teach like Saul. Some initiate conversations with strangers more easily than the rest of us. Some excel at patient discipleship over time. Some open homes. Some open Bibles. Some open opportunities for others to serve. The body grows when each part does its Spirit-gifted and Spirit-empowered work.

THEOLOGY Connection

(cont.) In the spirit of Christ, Christians should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death.

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Barnabas was not threatened by the gifts of others. He saw that the church needed to be strengthened, and he knew Saul could help. In ministry, as in many other areas of life, it is easy to enjoy being needed a little too much. It feels good to be central, to be consulted, to be the obvious person in the room. But Barnabas was not interested in his own clout; he was interested in the health of the church.

Healthy ministry is collaborative. God often grows His church through the partnership of different kinds of servants. Barnabas was an encourager, a stabilizing presence, a man able to see the grace of God and strengthen others. Saul, as his story unfolded, would be known especially for his theological depth, missionary courage, and apostolic preaching. These are complementary callings. The church needs encouragers and teachers, shepherds and missionaries, patient disciplers and bold proclaimers. Grace does not flatten the diversity of gifts; it harmonizes them in service of Christ.

Why do you think Barnabas invited Saul to serve the church in Antioch?

For a whole year, Barnabas and Saul "met with the church and taught large numbers" (11:26). New believers do not simply need a spiritual spark, they need sustained instruction. They need the truth about Christ explained, applied, and patiently pressed into their hearts over time.

If we want healthy churches, we must prize patient, Bible-focused teaching. The church needs Christ-centered teaching that forms minds, steadies hearts, and matures believers in grace. We all are susceptible to wanting spiritual fast food—something instantly

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gratifying, mildly encouraging, and forgotten an hour later. But the church grows strong through the steady nourishment of God's Word.

Luke then added, "The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch" (v. 26). These believers had become so identified with Christ that they were given a name derived from Him. Whatever the term's precise origin or tone—whether first used by outsiders with curiosity, mockery, or as a simple description—"Christian" marked that this community of believers was visibly centered on Jesus. Antioch was a diverse city, and this church was made up of people who, humanly speaking, would not naturally have been gathered into one family. What united them was Christ. They belonged to Him so thoroughly that His name was attached to theirs.

Grace to Generosity

Luke then mentioned that prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch and that one of them, Agabus, predicted through the Spirit that there would be a severe famine over the whole Roman world (vv. 27-28). Luke further noted that this famine took place during the reign of Claudius, underscoring that the prophecy corresponded to real history. Christianity unfolded in the world of emperors, economic shortages, and bodily need.

What matters most here is that the church received this word seriously. They did not shrug it off. Instead, they responded in concrete love. They heard that hardship was coming, and they mobilized to help.

There is always a danger among religious people of becoming interested in spiritual things in a way that is strangely detached from practical faithfulness. We

Notes

WORD Study

CHRISTIAN: The term for "Christian" in Greek includes a suffix that was originally applied to slaves and came to refer to adherents of a leader or group.[2] The term was originally coined in Antioch, possibly by the Romans to demean the "little Christs." Evidently the church in Antioch took on the label as a badge of honor.

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can become people who love to discuss theological issues while remaining curiously unmoved in the ordinary work of loving our neighbors. The church at Antioch, however, heard and acted. Truth moved outward into mercy.

Verse 29 tells us how the believers responded: "Each of the disciples, according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brothers and sisters who lived in Judea." These believers in Antioch, many of whom likely were Gentiles, decided to send aid to the Jewish Christians in Judea. The barriers that once divided Jew and Gentile were now being overcome in practical love as grace took tangible, financial form.

Notice several features of this generosity. First, it was voluntary. No one appeared to be coerced. Second, it was proportional. The church recognized that believers have different capacities, and yet, all could participate. Generosity in the body of Christ is not measured by a dollar amount but by shared willingness. Each gives according to his ability. Third, this generosity was directed toward real need. Christian compassion is more than emotion. It moves toward action.

Notice also the unity on display here. That the Antioch believers helped the Judean believers was not merely charity, it was family care. The church was learning to live as one body. The suffering of one part matters to the rest. This too is what the gospel creates. Union with Christ creates union with one another.

Luke concluded, "They did this, sending it to the elders by means of Barnabas and Saul" (v. 30). The gift of financial aid was entrusted to faithful men who would carry it responsibly. Barnabas and Saul were not merely teachers, they were servants. Their ministry was not confined to words alone. They also

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helped tangibly, delivering the material expression of the church's love.

Why can meeting physical needs back up our proclamation of the gospel but should never take the place of that proclamation?

Notes



How have you experienced the holistic nature of the gospel?



How can you cultivate concern for the well-being of others in the church?



What steps will you take in your finances or schedule so you are available to share the gospel holistically?

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1. Johann Spangenberg quoted in Esther Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, vol. VI, Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 154–155.
2. Darrell W. Robinson, "Christian," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, eds. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 288 [Logos].

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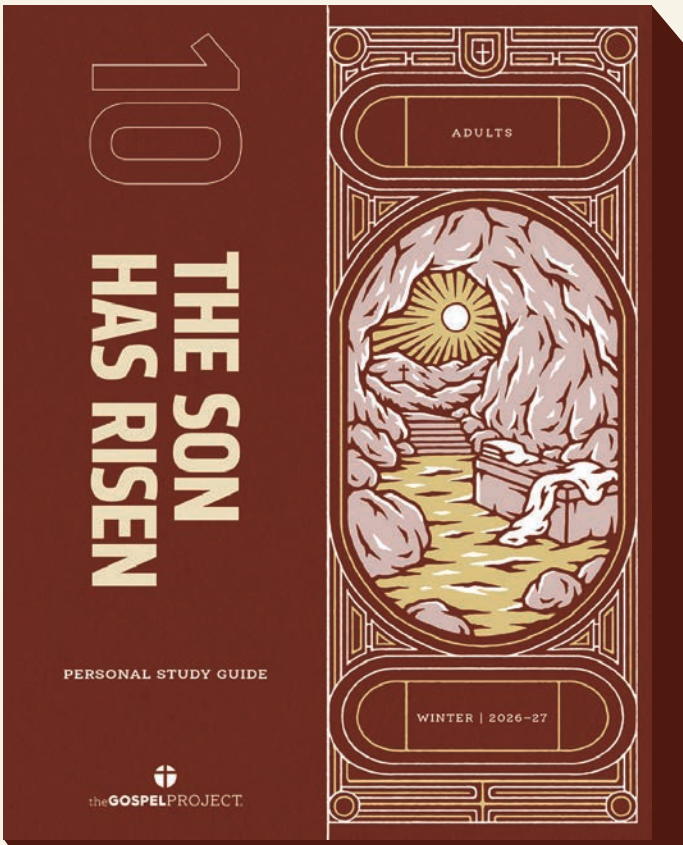

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