



# Acts - Book One

CHAPTERS 1-7

## The Church Established

"in JERUSALEM"

THE APOSTLES RECEIVE AND OBEY CHRIST'S COMMAND TO "BE MY WITNESSES IN JERUSALEM AND IN JUDEA AND SAMARIA AND TO THE END OF THE EARTH." THIS BOOK DESCRIBES THEIR WITNESS IN JERUSALEM, IT TELLS **WHAT HAPPENED AND HOW!**

**John Allan Lavender**

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## **The Church Established - Part 1**

Acts 1:1-8

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Key Truth: God Promises Power to His People

Attribute: God is Aware

### **A Book About Power**

The book of Acts is a chronicle of power. Power needed. Power given. Power received. Power applied. We worship a God who is aware. Aware of our needs, our anxieties, the tasks before us, and the resources available to us. Even as he was sensitive to the needs of early believers and reached out to them, so too, he is sensitive to us and our needs. Through the person of the Holy Spirit, he wishes to empower us to do that to which he has called us.

### **A Book About Roots**

The book of Acts is also a book about roots. If we were to trace our spiritual beginnings, we would ultimately come to the book of Acts. It is not only a beautiful piece of literature, it is one of the most important books of history ever written.

In the Old Testament there are eleven books which give us the Old Testament storyline. The other 28 books add many details and fill out the skeleton provided by those eleven books. In the New Testament, six books provide the narrative. Of these, Acts is indispensable. It is a bridge between the gospels and the epistles and leads us back to our beginnings.

### **A Book About Turning Points**

The book of Acts records two momentous turning points in human history. The turning from Jesus on the part of the Jews with the eclipse of Israel as the primary tool through which God would work in the world. And, the turning to Jesus on the part of Gentiles and the emergence of the Church as the agency through which God would, henceforth, do his work in the world. Therefore, as we begin our study, it's important that you make a commitment to read and re-read this book in the coming weeks. Read it in any and every translation you can find. Literally saturate yourself with the substance of this book so you can appropriate the power of which it speaks and understand the spiritual roots from which you come. In the process you will begin to become all God intends and has equipped you to be.

### **Luke-Acts: Two Parts of a Whole**

The first two verses of Acts make it clear this book is meant to be read in conjunction with the book of Luke. "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen" (Acts 1:1-2).

In the first chapter of Luke's gospel you will find confirmation of this link between the two books. "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitness and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent

Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed" (Luke 1:1-4).

The gospel of Luke describes the things Jesus began to do and teach until he ascended into heaven. The book of Acts tells of the things Jesus continued to do and teach following the ascension and, more importantly, how he did this. In Luke, the works and words of the Lord were made known in one body, his. In Acts, the works and words of our Lord are made known through many bodies, the Church. As believers were inhabited and empowered by the holy Spirit, they became extensions of Jesus in the world.

Taken together, the books of Luke and Acts give us the greatest contribution by a single author in the entire New Testament. In terms of sheer bulk, these two books are greater than all the letters of Paul combined, or the writings attributed to John. If we were confined to a selection of just two of the New Testament books and chose Luke and Acts, we would have access to everything we need to know to be born-again, Spirit-filled, growing Christians.

We would know the essence of the gospel, the mystery, ministry and structure of the Church, the purpose and person of the Holy Spirit, and we would possess the blessed hope of Christ's second coming. Each of these books contribute something which no other book in the New Testament gives. And, in Acts, not only do we have a bridge between the gospels and the epistles, "between the good news presented and the good news interpreted," we also have bits of information without which we could not fully appreciate or understand the rest of the New Testament.

In Acts we have the record of what happened from the time of the resurrection on through the ascension and the beginning of the Church. We have examples of early apostolic preaching. We have the itinerary of Paul without which we couldn't really appreciate the meaning and the timing of his letters. And we have a description of the Church, this unique entity called the Body of Christ, and how it became God's tool for the evangelization of the world.

### **Two Intertwining Themes**

In Acts there are two themes which so closely intertwine they are difficult to isolate. One is The Eclipse of Israel as the agent through which God does his work in the world. The other is The Emergence of The Church as his tool for the accomplishment of his purpose.

### **The Eclipse of Israel**

The first of these threads is the lesser known. Fuller understanding of it is beautifully given in J. Sidlow Baxter's superb book, *The Strategic Grasp Of The Bible*. In it, Dr. Baxter takes three chapters to describe with meticulous care and God-given insight how Acts is the record of God's second offer of the King and the Kingdom to Israel.

Throughout history, Israel had been very special to God. She had been the womb out of which the Messiah would be born. She was his people. He was her God. The relationship between Israel and God was beautiful and intense. But when Jesus was presented to the people of Israel, they didn't understand. They had the tradition of a lofty Messiah. A King who would come and restore the Nation to its former glory. They could not comprehend a peasant prince, a lowly "king" who had no interest in an earthly throne and went around talking about a "kingdom" that

was not of this world.

In their lack of understanding, they participated in his execution. On the cross, Christ was heard to say, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). And they didn't. Because the kind of King Jesus represented prior to the cross and resurrection, was strange and alien to their way of thinking.

### **Israel's Second Chance**

Following the resurrection, and during the days and months thereafter, God in his amazing grace, gave Israel a second chance. This time to see Jesus, not as a peasant prince who violated every concept of what an earthly King should be, but to see him in the power of his resurrection, in the glory of his risen authority. Baxter develops the idea that had they responded to this second revelation of Jesus and received him as their King; the Kingdom of God would have been given to Israel and a powerful movement of evangelism would have followed. As J. Sidlow Baxter says so poignantly, "Alas, given a second chance, a second presentation of their King and a second opportunity to inherit the Kingdom, Israel (as a whole) rejected Jesus again."

The book of Acts, which begins with the Church comprised exclusively of Jews, some three thousand or more of them, ends with the Church as a multinational, multi-cultural body comprised of people of every kind. The challenge to proclaim the good news "in Jerusalem and in all Judea" (Acts 1:8), places which were exclusively Jewish, ends on a sobering note, at least for Israel. "Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they *will* listen" (Acts 28:28 emphasis mine). Thus we have the first of these threads moving through the book of Acts: *The Eclipse of Israel* as the agency through which God will work in his world.

### **The Emergence of the Church**

Secondly, we have The Emergence of the Church as the tool God will use to accomplish his purpose. Baxter points out that in Acts, there are six panels or pieces of history which describe the emergence of the Church. Each of these conclude on virtually the same optimistic, hope-filled note.

**Panel one:** In Acts 6:7, there is this statement at the end of the presentation of the gospel in *Jerusalem*, "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith."

**Panel two:** In Acts 9:31, we find the response to the presentation of the gospel in *Samaria*. "So the Church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied."

**Panel three:** In Acts 12:24, we have the response to the presentation of the gospel in *Antioch*. It declares simply, "But the word of God grew and multiplied."

**Panel four:** In Acts 16:5, we see the result of the presentation of the gospel in *Asia Minor*. "So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily."

**Panel five:** In Acts 19:20, there is the response to the gospel as it is proclaimed in *Europe*. "So the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily."

**Panel six:** In Acts 28:30-31, the last two verses of this illuminating book, we have the response to the gospel in *Rome*, "And he (Paul) lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered." Thus we have this second theme which threads its way though Acts: *The Emergence of The Church*.

### **Cessation and Ascendancy**

The Israel line moves into eclipse as it ceases to be the primary means through which God accomplishes his purpose, and the Church line moves into ascendancy as it becomes the primary tool through which God gets his work done in the world.

Luke is a magnificent writer! As any good writer attempts to do, he leaves his readers in anticipation of what comes next. As you read the final verses of Luke, you are on tiptoes of expectancy. You want to ask Luke, "What happened next? We know Jesus was crucified, arose and ascended into heaven, but is that the end of the story, Luke? What happened next?"

When you move into Acts, Luke says what happened next was the Church! he describes how it was born and grew in usefulness to God. As confronted by the *risen* Christ, the Church began to learn about the Kingdom of God. "To them he presented himself *alive* after his passing by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking of the Kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

### **The Reality of the Resurrection**

Jesus went to great lengths to make his resurrection known. He appeared to his disciples and just as quickly disappeared. He repeatedly exposed them to the reality of his being alive in a variety of situations up to and including a group of as many as 500 people (1 Cor. 15:6). He knew there could be no uncertainty about his resurrection. About that there could be no doubt. If Jesus died, that was the end. But if Jesus died and rose again, that was the beginning!

For the early Church, the resurrection was no mere doctrine. It was no mere article of faith in a creed. It was the very Life from which they derived *their* life. It was something they knew that they knew to be true. About the resurrection there were no ifs, ands, or buts. The Lord saw to it that through "many proofs" (Acts 1:3) the reality of the resurrection changed that bunch of quaking cowards into a band of courageous conquerors who literally turned the world upside down.

### **Understanding the Kingdom**

In this same 40-day period, during which Christ made his living presence known to them in ways which were absolutely certain, he also taught them, Luke says, about the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God was one of the favorite themes of our Lord during his ministry on earth. He defined it for us in the beautiful model prayer he taught us to pray saying, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:9-10).

In Hebrew literature there is a device called parallelism. It is used by a writer to explain

something more clearly. A statement is made and then, in a second clause, there is given an explanation or extension of what was said in the first clause. In our Lord's model prayer there is an example of what Biblical scholars call Synthetic Parallelism.

First: "Thy Kingdom come." Then follows the clarifying clause: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The Kingdom of God is present when the will of God is done on earth as it is being done in heaven. Wherever and whenever the will of God is done, the Kingdom of God is present.

Jesus declared that which is to be (future), has broken into our time line (present). We are, in the words of George Eldon Ladd, experiencing "the presence of the future." The Kingdom of God is the will of God lived out in your life and mine here on earth, as it is being done in heaven.

That being true, if it is your goal in life to do the will of God, you will never be bored again. One reason for the feelings of emptiness and boredom which grip many people today is the achieving of unworthy goals. Some of us, coming out of the Great Depression, set the goal of never being hungry again. Of never being without economic security. But, having achieved these goals, we've found them to be hollow and unsatisfying. Others have set and reached other goals which they felt would bring them fulfillment only to be left empty and confused.

But if your goal is the Kingdom of God, that is, the will of God lived out in your life here and now, you will be excited, challenged and motivated every waking moment of every day until you go to be with the Lord. You will never be bored again.

### **Power Needed**

For the Kingdom of God to be realized in you requires a new kind of power. It isn't something you can accomplish in the energy of the flesh. Knowing that, Jesus gave his disciples some important instructions. "And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the holy Spirit'" (Acts 1:4).

It's impossible to do the King's business without the King's power. But with the King's power, ordinary folks can and will produce extraordinary results.

There is a text which troubled me for many years. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). As a young Christian, I couldn't understand that. If Jesus was the clearest picture of God the world had ever seen, how could it be to our advantage that he leave? Would it not have been better for him to stay and continue giving the world that clear revelation of God?

Later, I came to terms with the space/time limitation of the Incarnation. Occupying one body as he did, Jesus could only be in one place at one time ministering to one group of people. But when his Spirit escaped the limitations of the Incarnation and began to indwell all believers, God, who became clearest in the person of Jesus, became nearest in the person of the Holy Spirit. He is equally everywhere with all believers all the time. And through him, you and I have the resources required to do the task assigned us.

### **Power Given**

"So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?' And he said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But, you shall receive power when the holy Spirit is come upon you and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth'" (Acts 1:6-8).

It's as if Jesus were saying, "From now on, your preoccupation should not be speculation, but demonstration." For the people of Jesus' time, the preoccupation and speculation centered around the Kingdom of God as they understood it in relationship to the nation of Israel. For us the temptation is to speculate about the second coming of Jesus. We need to know about, believe in, and be encouraged by that blessed hope. But you and I must not become obsessively preoccupied with things to come. Our calling is not speculation, but demonstration.

### **Power Received**

Jesus said we are to be his "witnesses." That's a beautiful word. Among other things, it signifies knowledge of something or someone. We cannot witness about One whom we do not know! Therefore, it is essential that we know Jesus. That we be intimately acquainted with *who* he is and *what* he is to Christian believers. On the basis of what we know, and through the empowerment by the Holy Spirit, we are to present evidence of the positive changes which have occurred since Jesus came into our hearts.

In a court of law, a photograph of an accident scene carries greater evidentiary weight than an oral description of the scene. In our witness before the world, the "photograph" of our walk has far greater impact than the testimony of our words. God grant that there shall be no difference between them. What we say with our lips should be reflected in our life, for it is both thrilling and chilling to hear Jesus say, "You will be my witnesses." It means we are to corroborate his claim to ". . . make all things new" (Rev. 21:5).

What kind of a witness are you giving to the world today? What kind of evidence does your life present to the saving, redeeming and transforming power of the Lord Jesus?

God's purpose for Israel was not to restore their past, to bring back "the good old days," but to transform their past, present and future! Similarly, his ministry to us is to transform our time line: to move into memories of times, events, circumstances, words, actions and attitudes in our past which leave us with an ugly taste in our mouth, and heal them. To change our past from events which intimidate us into something new which inspires us. And so, God gives us the past of Jesus which is perfect! As a result, when he looks at us, he doesn't see us and our past. He sees Jesus, and the past of Jesus, which is without flaw. Wow!

Building on the transformation of our past, it is also the Loving Father's ministry to bring transformation to our present: to release us from the icy grip of guilt and free us to be. To be our self. Our true self. The self he designed us to be. This happens through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us (Rom. 8:1-6). By receiving and releasing the power of his Spirit to work in us we become worthy witnesses, dynamic evidence of what Jesus can do in human lives.

Finally, it is God's purpose to transform our future. Lots of anxiety there, right? Probably more than at any other time in our memory. But, as someone has said, "I don't know what the future holds, but I know Who holds the future and I know he holds my hand." As a consequence, there is peace and confidence because we have this assurance: 'what was meant to be in the beginning will be in the end.' History is his-story. It is a record of what God is doing to ultimately achieve his purpose for the whole creation (Rom. 8:18-22).

### **Power Applied**

Look at the enlarging concentric circles of responsibility and influence to which the Church is called: ". . .and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8b).

"Jerusalem." Where they were. That's where their witness was to begin. "All Judea." Where they were to go. Their extended sphere of influence. "Samaria." An uncomfortable place for Jews to be. Samaria was the homeland of folks who were neither Jew nor Gentile. In that place, where there was lots of hostility toward Israelis, they were to be prima facia evidence of the difference it makes in folks, even Jews, when they become born-again, Spirit-filled, growing followers of Christ. "The ends of the earth." Those exciting, mysterious, far off places with strange sounding names. There, too, they were to be living proof of God's love, acceptance and forgiveness extended to all mankind.

It occurs to me that, as members of the Church today, we are to be witnesses where we are. That's where we start. Moving out, we are to be witnesses wherever we go. We are to be witnesses in places which are, at times, uncomfortable. Places where we work, play, go to school, socialize. Ultimately, we are to be witnesses everywhere, and all the time. In our Jerusalem, our Judea, our Samaria, our world.

Today's Attribute declares *God Is Aware*. He is aware of our needs. He is aware of our anxieties. He is aware of the task to which we have been called. He is aware of the power shortage we suffer in attempting to fulfill this task in the energy of our flesh.

But, praise the Lord, that's not the end of his awareness. He is also aware of, and ready to supply, the kind of power which is equal to the task: *dunamis! The King's Power for the King's Business.*



## **The Church Established - Part 2**

Acts 1:9-26

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Key Truth: God Prepares His People to Experience His Power

Attribute: God is Concerned

### **Two Important Threads**

Two parallel themes move inexorably through Acts. One is The Progressive Rejection of Jesus by the Jews which results in the eclipse of Israel as the primary tool through which God does his work in the world. The other is The Progressive Reception of Jesus by the Gentiles and the emergence of the Church as the primary agency through which God will work in the world.

In his gospel, Dr. Luke records how, in their synagogues and other gathering places, the gospel of the King and the Kingdom was presented to Israel and they rejected it. In the book of Acts he shows how, following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the Jewish nation received a second offer of the King and the Kingdom, and for a second time, rejected it. As you watch for the eclipse of Israel, keep in mind the emergence of the Church as it becomes a multi-national, multi-cultural body which is prepared to take the good news of Christ and his Kingdom to the world.

### **Two Books As One**

Together Luke and Acts comprise a unified statement about the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke tells us the things Jesus *began* to do and teach through *one* body, his own. Acts describes the things Jesus *continued* to do and teach through *many* bodies, his Church. The book of Acts is often called “The Acts of the Apostles.” A more appropriate title might be: “The Acts of Jesus through the Apostles by the Holy Spirit.” In any case, when we read these two books together, we have the essence of both the gospel and the mission of the Church.

### **What It Means to Be a Witness**

The book of Acts introduces the concept of concentric circles of expanding witness by the Church. “. . . you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8b). Being witnesses is not optional. It isn’t something we choose to do or not do. We *are* witnesses. The only issue is: what kind of witnesses are we?

When Jesus said, “You shall be my witnesses,” he meant exactly that. It’s going to happen. The only option open is to determine the quality and characteristics of our witnessing. In that regard, what we *do* is more important than what we *say*. It is inevitable that we will give testimony and present evidence because that’s what witnesses do. Hopefully, there will be no disparity between our testimony (or words) and our evidence (or works).

Jimmy Carter, prior to becoming President of the United States, saw the need for a re-birth experience when he came across this question: “If you were on trial and charged with being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” He examined that question and concluded there would not be sufficient evidence to convict him. As a consequence he moved into a living relationship with Christ called the new birth. How about you and me? Would there

be enough evidence to convict us? If the answer is no, it's time to do serious business with the Lord remembering: as a witness, what we *do* is far more significant than what we *say*.

Sometime ago, Guidepost Magazine had an article about Billy Sunday. He was the Billy Graham of an earlier era but was much more flamboyant and unorthodox than Graham. He would pick up chairs and fight the devil with them. He was quite a showman. As a consequence, he had many critics. One of them was a banker in Pennsylvania where Billy Sunday was holding a crusade. It was in this man's bank that the offerings for the crusade were deposited each day. The banker was not a Christian and had little respect for itinerant preachers, especially Billy Sunday. As the offerings began to mount, his antipathy toward Billy grew.

The Monday morning following the last crusade meeting, Mr. Sunday came in with the last bag of money. In it was a check for \$5.00. This was during the 1920's when \$5.00 was a sizeable amount of money. The banker saw the check and said, "We can't honor it." "Why?" asked Billy. "Because the woman who wrote it doesn't have \$5.00 in her checking account. She's a poor widow. As a matter of fact, we have a \$1,500 mortgage on her home and will have to foreclose because she can't make the payments." Billy Sunday tore the \$5.00 check in half. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a piece of paper, began writing on it and said, "Will you honor this check?" It was for \$1500, the full amount of the mortgage!. "Why are you doing this?" the banker asked. Billy Sunday said quietly, "Sir, have you never heard what the Good Book says about the obligation of a man of means to the orphans and the widows?"

As the weeks went by, the banker pondered what he'd seen. He wondered how many other times Billy Sunday had done something like that, just as quietly and anonymously. Remembering a verse he had heard in Sunday School during his childhood, "The measure you give is the measure you get." He wondered if that woman, giving out of her want, had somehow triggered the power of God to provide her need. As a result of that pondering, he became a Christian. "He never heard Billy Sunday preach from the pulpit," the article says. "Sunday's only sermon was his signature on a check." Similarly, you and I are witnesses for Christ. There is no way around it. The only question is, are we the kind of witnesses who will make a difference in someone's life?

### **Christ's Ascension**

"And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing up into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven'" (Acts 1:9-10).

Two important happenings filled with immeasurable hope for you and me are dealt with in these brief verses. There is, first of all, the ascension of Jesus Christ. To appreciate its value, we need to allow the reality of that event to escape the limitations of first century language. The words, as they appear in our text, reflect a view of the universe prevalent at that time. We, from the perspective provided by 2,000 years of learning, understand it differently.

We now know, for instance, nothing is solid. Everything is in motion. The distance between the neutron, proton and electron which comprise an atom is as great, relatively speaking, as the

distance between the sun, moon and stars. There are vast reaches of open space in that which we call “solid.” It is possible for two or more states of existence to occupy the same space, at the same time, with neither aware of the other because they operate on what, in layman’s language, might be called “different wave lengths.”

From the perspective of what we currently understand, it’s possible to say Jesus did not drift off into the far reaches of outer space, but simply moved into another dimension of existence. We are not obliged to think of him as being billions of light years away. The Bible speaks of our being “surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1). This suggests they are “right here!” That heaven is “right here!” That God is “right here!”

Dr. Luke, a physician, seems to have believed so. In Acts 17:28a, he quotes Paul as saying, “In him (God) we live and move and have our being.” Solomon, a man of great wisdom, wrote, “Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain Thee” (1 Kings 8:27). God is not contained. He contains. His center is everywhere. His boundaries are nowhere. That being true, when Jesus moved from earth to heaven, he was immediately with the Father. The Reality from which he had come is the Reality to which he returned. There, “at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55,56), he now acts as an advocate for you and me (1 John 2:1).

Think of it: there is a *man* in heaven! A *man* who, in the language of Hebrews 4:15, “can sympathize with our weaknesses.” A *man* who was “tempted as we are yet without sinning.” A *man* who knows the nature of our human struggle and now intercedes for us before the Father so “. . .we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16b). Wow!

### **Christ’s Promised Return**

Second, the disciples learned that the Lord, who had come and gone, was to come again. “This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go” (Acts 1:11b).

These twenty one words tell us a great deal about the second coming of Christ. First, it will be *actual*. He will indeed come. Second, it will be *personal*. This same Jesus will return. Third, it will be *tangible*. “As you saw him go, so he will come”. Fourth, it will be *visible*. Folks will be able to see, comprehend and understand it. Finally, it will be *unpredictable*. He was with them and, in a heart beat, was gone. The seen became unseen. The visible became invisible. Similarly, he will return “. . .in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:52). The unseen will become seen. The invisible will become visible. He who has gone, will come again.

### **His-story Is Not Haphazard**

As a consequence of this revelation, and following the clue Jesus had given them regarding times and seasons (Acts 1:1-7), they left the scene of the ascension with high expectation of things to come. Luke 24:52,53 declares, “And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.”

They now knew God had a plan! A plan for them. A plan for his people. A plan for his world. The promise of a second coming of Jesus confirmed for them the fact that there is nothing haphazard about history. Life on this planet is not a collection of disjointed events: a kind of hodgepodge of happenings. History is going somewhere! That somewhere is the Consummation when Jesus will return as both Lord and King. Based on that grand hope they

began living on tiptoes of expectancy.

Not many of us live that way today. It's possible, perhaps, that we, and I include myself in this, have become so familiar with the doctrine of the Second Coming that our delight in the Lord's return has been lost.

One of the great preachers of an earlier time was "Kernie" Keagan. He served for years as pastor of a great Church in Los Angeles. Early in his ministry "Kernie" was invited to go to a distant town to preach. He came home exhausted and asked his wife to keep their little five year old daughter quiet so he could sleep in and renew his strength for the coming week. The little girl awakened early the following morning and, unaware of her daddy's request, came bounding down the hall. "Kernie," who was over-tired and had tossed and turned all night, heard her coming and pretended to be asleep. As little girls will, she jumped up on her daddy's bed and gave him a big hug and kiss.

It was no use feigning sleep so he hugged and kissed her back. Then, just as quickly as she had landed on the bed, she jumped down, ran to the window and threw up the shade. Looking out the window, she asked, "Is he here yet?" "Who?" "Why, Jesus of course. Yesterday mommy told me he is coming back again. Is he here yet?" In recounting this incident, "Kernie" said, "When she had gone off to her playing I got down on my knees and prayed, 'Dear Lord, forgive me for having lost a sense of expectancy. Forgive me for being so familiar with the doctrine of your coming I have lost the delight of anticipating your return.'" Jesus is coming again! He is coming soon. And we need that motivating awareness to help us be the kind of witnesses the world needs in such a time as this.

### **Wrapping It Up**

The balance of this chapter is that portion of scripture from which we took our Key Truth and Attribute: *God Prepares his People To Experience his Power*. Or to come at it another way, God is concerned that we receive his power and learn to apply it. Following the ascension, a number of things happened. To begin with, they returned to Jerusalem (Acts 1:12) and went to the upper room (Acts 1:13). I was discussing this with our daughter Julie who, at that time, was sixteen. "Daddy," she said, "I think the reason they went to the upper room is because they were comfortable there. It was a place where so many great things happened to them. Where Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit into them and they were born again. Where they shared quality time with him. I think they went back to basics." What a great thought! They went back to a place where they could find themselves again after the stress and distress of the crucifixion and the alienation which followed.

In the upper room we find a "mixed bag." Along with the apostles were "... the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers"(Acts 1:14). Do you remember how his family had rejected him early on? They were ready to commit him. Now following the resurrection, his brothers are ready to own him as both Savior and Lord, as is his mother. With one accord they set about getting ready for "the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4) of which Jesus had spoken.

Later, Peter spoke to this company of 120 (Acts 1:15). Ponder that for a moment. There were a million or more people in Jerusalem. There were just 120 Christians. Considering what we now

know happened on the day of Pentecost, and following, this is a powerful illustration of what God can do with even a few people when he has all of them.

Thought was then given to the problem of Judas' replacement (Acts 1:16-20). The figure 12 had great significance. There were 12 tribes. There were 12 apostles. Now that Judas had committed suicide, they were one short. The replacement process is interesting. They decided the twelfth "witness to (Christ's) resurrection" (Acts 1:23) must be someone who had been with them from the beginning (Acts 1:21-22). They selected two candidates. They prayed for the Lord's guidance (Acts 1:24-25). They "cast lots" and Matthias was selected (Acts 1:26).

Some expositors suggest Peter acted hastily. They struggle with the fact that "they cast lots" to determine how this person was to be chosen. And yet, the Old Testament reveals this to be a fairly common custom in the Jewish community. Dr. Luke doesn't give much detail as to how it was done. It was not a kind of first-century roulette wheel. In all probability they wrote the names of the two men on rocks, put them in a box, and shook it until one fell out. We might think of a more sophisticated way of doing it. But, and this is the key, they did everything based on their understanding of scripture and they did so in an attitude of prayer. "Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two thou hast chosen" (Acts 1:24). We know what we have to do, Lord. Show us whom you would have help us do it!

### **Healthy Relationships a Prerequisite for Power**

God was preparing the disciples to experience his power. Chapter two of Acts deals with the exciting reality of Pentecost. But before that could take place, they had to get their act together. These were people who had their differences. Who fussed with each other. Who competed with each other for position and honor. Who, in Peter's case, denied the Lord and, in the case of the others, defected from the Lord. It seemed doubtful they could ever be "of one accord." But they were!

In the words of Irving L. Jensen, "Under the stress and bewilderment of the crucifixion they defected, divided, disintegrated as a group." The inescapable reality of the resurrection turned them completely around and we find them "of one accord." They were on the same page spiritually and relationally.

How did they get that way? Did they spend time sharing with one another? Did they worship our God who is concerned? Did they confess to him, and to one another, those things which had impeded his work in their lives? Did they thank him for reaching out to them in their time of brokenness? Did they present their supplications to him, not just their requests? Did they make it clear they were willing to become whatever he wanted them to become?

The word "supplication" comes from a root word meaning "supple." It suggests the idea of being pliable, flexible, moldable. Did they, along with their adoration, confession, and thanksgiving present their supplication, their malleability, to the Lord? Did each of them express something like the hymnist who wrote:

"Have Thine own way, Lord,  
Have Thine own way.  
Thou art the potter,

I am the clay.  
Mold me and make me  
After Thy will,  
While I am waiting  
Yielded and still.”

We know they were being guided by scripture. Repeatedly, Peter refers to what their Bible, the Old Testament, said. We know they were in an attitude of prayer. We know the disciples had already received the gift of the Holy Spirit. John 20:22 tells how Jesus came into the upper room, breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” I envision him going from one to another, exhaling on each of them individually and saying, “Peter! H-u-u-u-u-h-h-h, receive the Holy Spirit.” “John! H-u-u-u-u-h-h-h, receive the Holy Spirit.” “Andrew! H-u-u-u-u-h-h-h, receive the Holy Spirit,” until all of them received the Gift. Indeed, they had the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit did not yet have them! In the past, the Spirit had anointed them for specific times of service. But now that the work of God in the world was to fall to them, it was not only important that they have him, but that he have them!

Our need is precisely the same. As born-again Christians, we have the Holy Spirit. He is in us. He is the practical presence of Christ in all believers. The Holy Spirit is to us what Christ would be if he were here himself, so we can be to the world what Christ would be if he were here himself. In the past, the Holy Spirit may have anointed us for times of special service, but more than anything in all this world we need his fullness. And we need it again and again and again.

If we are to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit we must do as the disciples did. We must yield our will to him and be willing to let go of every hindrance. Every attitude alien to Christ must be dealt with. Every thought, priority and value must be brought into harmony with the mind of Christ. There must be nothing between us and the Savior.

Then, when we have our act together, when every unforgiving spirit has been dealt with and every need for forgiveness has been sought, then, being in an attitude of prayer guided by Holy Scripture, we can receive his fullness knowing he is infinitely more ready to give, than we are ready to receive. The result? We, like those first century saints, will be identifiably Christian. There will be evidence the world can see that we belong to him. And that’s what you really want, isn’t it?

## **The Church Established - Part 3**

Acts 2:1-13

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Key Truth: When God's People Utilize God's Power, Miracles Occur

Attribute: God is Giver

### **Probing Questions**

Having dealt with the historical reality of the Birth, Life, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus in his gospel and chapter one of Acts, Dr. Luke turns now to the next Big Event in the unfolding New Testament story line, "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place" (Acts 2:1).

Many of God's people have thoughtful questions about the precise meaning of Pentecost. What was there about this particular day which made it God's choice for the public unveiling of this wonderful new thing called the Church? Why was Pentecost the perfect occasion for the outpouring of the Spirit of God upon his people? For answers we turn to the Old Testament!

### **A Historical Perspective**

The historical meaning of Pentecost to the Jewish people is described for us in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Because Leviticus is especially good at filling in details around major events covered in the narrative books, we will focus there. Leviticus 23 out the place of Pentecost in God's plan for Israel. It was one of three major festivals, or holy days, every Jewish male was expected to honor.

The first of these is the Feast of Passover (Leviticus 23:5-15). The second is the Feast of Tabernacles, called here the Feast of Booths (Leviticus 23:33-36). In between is the third, the Feast of Pentecost. "And you shall count from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven full weeks shall they be, counting fifty days to the morrow after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall present a cereal offering of new grain to the Lord. You shall bring from your dwellings two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of fine flour, they shall be baked with leaven, as first fruits to the Lord" (Leviticus 23:15-18).

### **Three Considerations**

First, preparation for Pentecost is to start "the day following the end of Passover" (Leviticus 23:15), that is, from that Sunday they are to count seven weeks. From this we get one of Pentecost's "nicknames:" the Feast of Weeks. Second, they are to add a fiftieth day, the Sunday following the Sabbath of the seventh week; and from this the term Pentecost, or fiftieth day, is derived. Third, they are to bring two loaves of bread baked with leaven, made from the new grain of the harvest as a first fruits offering to the Lord. As a result, sometimes Pentecost is called the Feast of First Fruits, at other times the Feast of Weeks, and on still other occasions simply Pentecost.

### **A Joyful Festival**

Pentecost was to be a day of joyful celebration as the people dedicated the first fruits of the new harvest to the Lord. It was a feast which not only permitted the use of leaven in bread but actually prescribed it, a significant difference from the Passover Feast when leaven was

prohibited. Leaven is thought by some to represent the presence of evil, and yet for Pentecost there is specific instruction to include leaven in the bread prepared as an offering to the Lord.

One other interesting detail. The Israelites were told to bring a special offering to God consisting of a sheaf, a small representation of new grain from the harvest; and they were to do so on the Sunday following the last day of the Passover week. “Do this on the morrow after the Sabbath” (Leviticus 23:11b).

### **Putting It All Together**

What relevance has this for contemporary believers, and why did God choose Pentecost as the day upon which he publicly unveiled the Church? First of all, there was the Feast of the Passover celebrating Israel's salvation and ultimate deliverance from bondage to Egypt. You'll remember how, on that grim night, the angel of death passed through Egypt and slew the first born of every household except those which had the blood of a sacrificial lamb spilled on the door posts and lintels. When the angel of death saw the blood, he “passed over.” Thus, the term Passover Feast.

The Sheaf or Cereal Offering came on the Sunday immediately following the last day of Passover. This small representation of the coming harvest was a kind of “faithlifter” aimed at assuring themselves of God's acceptance. “. . . and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, that you may find acceptance; on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it” (Leviticus 23:11). Pentecost occurred fifty days after the symbolic First Fruits Offering. It was to be a full-scale celebration of the new harvest when they demonstrated their joy and celebration by using leavened bread.

Perhaps you've already drawn the parallels, but let's review them together. On Calvary, our Passover Lamb was slain. Upon the cross, the blood of Jesus was spilt for us. Through his death, our slavery to sin was potentially broken. Salvation and deliverance from sin were made available to us for the asking. On the Sunday following the Passover, Christ arose from the dead. In the magnificent phraseology of Paul, “. . . the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20), a symbol of the immeasurable harvest of souls who would conquer death because of his resurrection. Fifty days hence came Pentecost. While all the participants on that occasion were Jews, over time Pentecost became a major Christian event marking the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell and endow saved-sinners with the power required to break free from slavery to see and accomplish the task God gave the Church..

### **Remember the Leaven?**

Part of the symbolism in God's selection of Pentecost as the day he would present the gift of the Holy Spirit is captured in the use of leavened bread. Centuries before, Isaiah had described a people who “. . . like sheep have gone astray, (who) have turned to (their) own way” (Isaiah 55:5-6) and required the death of One whom we now know to be Jesus: “. . .the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

God never has had, nor will he ever have, perfect people through whom to do his work. The Church was to be, and still is, constructed of sinners saved by grace. People who struggle with what we might call “the leaven of fallen flesh.” Sinners who, having experienced salvation through the blood of their Passover Lamb, having been assured of their redemption by his resurrection and thrilled by his ascension into heaven where he intercedes for them, would,



despite the leaven of their humanity, be endued with the supernatural power required to live holy lives and be to the world what Christ would be if he were here himself.

The three thousand who were converted that first Pentecost became, as part of the Body of Christ, the “first fruit” of untold millions of imperfect people who, though “leavenized” by sin, will still be added to God's great harvest in Christ. Excuse me, but hallelujah!

### **The Most Popular Feast**

Another possible reason God chose Pentecost to publicly unveil the Church is because it was the most popular of Jewish Holy Days. Toward the end of the Old Testament narrative of God's activity in the world, we are told the Jews were dispersed. They were scattered to the four winds. The devout among them carried in their hearts the hope that one day a Messiah would come to redeem them and establish his kingdom among them.

As a result of the dispersion, the requirements surrounding the Holy Days changed. Political conditions, the demands of time, and the uncertainty of weather often made attendance in Jerusalem difficult. Therefore, unlike the Old Testament protocol where everyone “had to show up,” only people living within twenty miles of Jerusalem were *required* to participate in these three main events. For devout Jews living great distances away who wished to participate in at least one of the feast days, Pentecost was especially attractive. The harvest was over. Weather conditions made for smooth sailing if they were to travel by sea. The time of the year, late spring, was almost idyllic in that part of the world, not too hot, nor too cold, just right for a great festival. So Pentecost became the most popular of the three great feasts.

### **God's Gather/Scatter Strategy**

“Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5). Those who had been scattered because of the dispersion, were gathered. They had come from their homes in distant lands to Jerusalem where they were exposed to the incredible happenings of that particular Pentecost, and then they were scattered again. They returned to their homes carrying with them the Good News that the promised Messiah had, in fact, come. As a consequence not only were people all over the world enabled to hear the Good News, but it began to dawn on the more discerning, that the Good News was for people all over the world!

Why this particular day? Because no other could have been more timely, more fitting, or more filled with significant symbolism than the day of Pentecost. It was exactly right for what God wanted to do. Truly, his way, like his will, is best.

### **Renewal Requirements Met**

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place” (Acts 2:1). God's time had arrived and God's people were united spiritually and relationally. For days they had been in the upper room making things right between themselves and the Lord, and between themselves and each other (Acts 1:12ff). They had dealt with old animosities as well as old attitudes of pride and fear. The ambition which had divided them, creating stress and strain, was put to rest. They got their act together. In the process, these believers who had received the *gift* of the Holy Spirit in an earlier upper room experience (John 20:22) were being prepared to walk in the *fullness* of the Spirit. Each sin dealt with under the blood, each bit of ego set aside, each area of self vacated, made them more open to the Spirit's control. The more of themselves they

gave to him, the more he was freed to give himself to them. When all of the conditions were right and God's people were united, God's Appointed Day arrived.

### **Suddenly Isn't Sudden**

“And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:2-5).

Whenever we come upon this word “suddenly” in scripture, it ought to generate a smile because, while the crucial events on God's timetable appear to happen “suddenly” they are, in fact, announced well in advance and are usually a long time in coming.

Take, for instance, the flood. It happened “suddenly.” But long before the rains began, the flood had been announced and there was adequate time for preparations to be made. Genesis 6 and 7 explain that Noah was roughly 500 years old when his sons were born, and 600 years old when he entered the ark with sons now grown and married. During that century, the ark was built, preparations were made, there were announcements that a flood was to come, and then “suddenly” the rain came.

Then there was the birth of Jesus. We're told that “suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host . . .” (Luke 2:13). And yet, for centuries God had announced that one day his Anointed would come to earth. The prophecies regarding the first coming of Jesus are numerous and, bit by bit, they were fulfilled as time approached. Then “suddenly” Jesus was born.

The same is true of Pentecost. “Suddenly” there was “a sound from heaven . . . and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.” But long before, God had announced there was a time coming when he would “pour out his Spirit on all flesh” (Joel 2:28).

### **Sights and Sounds**

Notice how God got the attention of not only the 120, but all Jerusalem. “A sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:2).

The original language permits a variety of expressions to describe what happened and various translators have put it differently. Some have called it a deafening roar. Others have likened it to a tornado-like gale. A contemporary translator has called it a huge super-sonic boom! I like that. But, at any rate, appealing to the ear-gate, God got their attention. He let them know something really significant was happening. The Holy Spirit had come. And, like the wind, though he couldn't be seen, there was no doubting his presence. He was free, not frozen. He was flexible, not fixed.

Not only did God appeal to the ear-gate, he also employed the eye-gate. “And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them” (Acts 2:3). The Shekinah glory, the very glory of God himself, came to rest upon each of them as if God was saying, “My Spirit is given to *every* one of you.” God was assuring them the Holy Spirit was present and, like controlled fire, he is purposeful. He's creative, not destructive. He's personal, not impersonal. He came to “rest on each of them.” None were left out.

### **What Did and Did Not Happen**

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). It's important to note they did not “get” the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. They already had him. That happened, as recounted in John 20:22, when Jesus came into the room where they were gathered, breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” In that moment they were born-again as the Spirit came to dwell within them (Romans. 8:9). Prior to the upper room experience they were enlightened souls, but they were still “dead in trespasses and sin” (Ephesians 2:1). After the upper room experience, they were quickened spirits. That which was dead as a result of Adam's sin, the human spirit, was made alive in Christ, for “as in Adam all die, all in Christ shall be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22).

John 20:22 is God's gracious response to Genesis 2:17 which records the fall. As *event*, the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred in the upper room (John 20:22) when, in keeping with Paul's later revelation: “. . . by one Spirit (they) all were baptized into one body . . .” (1 Corinthians 12:13a). There is nothing in the context to suggest any immediate manifestation of the Spirit occurred at that time. Apparently, whatever was felt at their new birth, as at ours, was entirely subjective and unique to each individual. Nevertheless they were now part of the Body of Christ, had received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and were free to draw upon, “made to drink of” (1 Corinthians 12:13b) this new Power Source within them to successfully live the supernatural lifestyle to which they were being called.

On the day of Pentecost, scripture says they were “all filled with the Holy Spirit.” It doesn't say “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” occurred, though it did! Jesus said they would be baptized (Acts 1:5) and they were! This time, however, as *evidence* rather than *event*. The result was objective, not just subjective. Previously, they knew something had happened to them (John 20:22), now others knew something had happened to them (Acts 2:4-13).

If I have an empty glass into which I begin to pour water, when do you know it's full? That's right. When there's water all over the floor! Something is recognizably full when it overflows. Similarly, the objective evidence proving these dear people were “filled with the Holy Spirit” was the overflow of that fullness expressed in an amazing miracle. They were boldly witnessing, a miracle in itself considering their recent reticence, and they were speaking languages they had never learned.

### **The Miracle of Tongues**

“Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language” (Acts 2:5-6).

Let me reconstruct the scene for you. Being Pentecost, there were devout Jews from Asia Minor to the north, Persia to the east, Egypt to the south and Italy to the west. Folks from all points of the compass were present. When they heard that first century super-sonic boom, they came running to the place from which the sound originated. Simultaneously, these 120 believers who had been in the upper room praying and praising God, had been “filled with the Holy Spirit” and were unable to contain their joy. They burst out of the room into the temple court where they were met by a great crowd of curious spectators. To the amazement of all, the speakers as well

as the hearers, the disciples “began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4b).

The visiting Jews were amazed. “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in our own native language? And how is it we hear them telling in our own tongues . . . the mighty works of God? All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others mocking said, 'They are filled with new wine’” (Acts 2:7-8, 11-13).

What happened, you see, was the miracle of tongues as contrasted with the gift of tongues discussed later in the New Testament. As our Key Truth declares: *When God's People Utilize God's Power, Miracles Occur*. These fired-up, Spirit-filled believers began to boldly declare the glory of God and what he had accomplished through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. While they were thinking in Aramaic, their native tongue, a miracle occurred. God took control of their speech mechanism and they began speaking languages they had never learned. They were thinking Aramaic, but speaking something else.

In the crowd of spectators was a man from a distant place and he heard some of them testifying in his language. The rest were speaking what sounded like gibberish to him. However, what he thought to be gibberish made sense to the person next to him, because *he* recognized it to be *his* native language!

What actually happened is that each person heard one intelligible language, his own, and fifteen or so other languages he did not understand. The text suggests there were at least 16 different dialects spoken by the believers on that particular Pentecost. Each of the Jewish Pentecostal celebrants heard one language he understood and many he didn't understand. As a consequence, they were amazed and perplexed. The more cynical among them said, “They are drunk!”

### **A Double Sign**

The miracle of tongues provided what we might call a double sign. It was a sign, first of all, to these new born Christians that Jesus, through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and in keeping with his promise, was as close to them as it is possible to be. So close, in fact, he could control their speech! Their minds were clear. They were thinking Aramaic, but speaking languages they had never learned. Their reaction must have been something like this: Wow! No wonder Jesus said it was expedient that he go in order that the Counselor might come. When we are filled with the Spirit we have power. Wonderful power. Power to do those “greater things” Jesus said we would do! Can't you imagine how reassuring the miracle of Pentecost was to the disciples? Jesus' promise was being fulfilled.

The miracle of tongues was also a sign in a second way. Everyone present knew the disciples were Galilean. The Aramaic language, as spoken in Galilee, was guttural and easily recognized. You may recall it was the Galilean speech of Peter which gave him away on the night our Lord was betrayed. To find guttural Galileans fluently speaking the dialects of the world couldn't help but have a profound effect upon the people who heard them doing so. Their reaction must have been something like this: Wow! God is doing Something Special here. Something for all of us. He has really touched these people. They're alive! You can see it in their faces. You can hear it in their voices.

### **The Baptism of the Holy Spirit**

In that moment, just as John had prophesied three years earlier (Matthew 3:11) and Jesus had prophesied prior to his ascension (Acts 1:5), those Spirit-filled believers were baptized in or with (the Greek article permits both) the Holy Spirit. The active presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and their willingness to be controlled by him, spilled over providing tangible, measurable evidence which clearly identified them as followers of Jesus.

Much of the confusion surrounding the phrase “baptism of the Holy Spirit” springs from defining it as a once and for all time experience when, upon closer examination, the Bible suggests the two nouns, *event* and *evidence with continuing implications*, are more appropriate. *Event*, which literally makes Christian believers part of the body of Christ and releases the empowering work of the Holy Spirit to them (1 Corinthians 12:13). *Evidence*, which each time they operate in the fullness of the Spirit symbolically identifies believers as recognizable members of that Body (Acts 2:4; 4:8,31; 6:3,5; 7:55; and 13:9).

What was the purpose of John's baptism (Matthew 3:1-12)? It was *event*, of course. Real people were being immersed in real water by John, a real person. But was it designed to produce repentance in those whom John baptized? No. It was an outward sign or *evidence* signifying those being baptized had already repented. Baptism in water identified them as people committed to righteousness. Each subsequent act of righteousness further identified them as such, symbolically, as the baptizing quality or *evidence* of a righteous life was made manifest.

What is the meaning of Believers Baptism? It is *event*, of course. Once again, real people are immersed in real water by a real person. But is it intended to result in their salvation and cleansing from sin? No. Baptism is not something one does to *be* saved. It is outward *evidence* of an inner reality signifying that one has *been* saved, has died to him or her self, has come alive in Christ, and is “buried therefore with him by baptism unto death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk (a continuing process) in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). Each step of obedience provides additional *evidence* of their walk with him.

To be sure, Believer's Baptism is a wonderful once and for all time experience, but it is much more than that. While in prison Susan Atkins, the Manson girl, came to know the Savior and asked to be baptized. There was no baptistry available, so a farmer loaded an old watering trough into his pickup truck, hauled it to the prison where it was filled with water, and Susan Atkins was baptized. As she came up out of the water, she said, “Praise the Lord, I am clean at last.” Well, I praise the Lord with her, but Susan Atkins was clean long before she was baptized. The instant she confessed her sin, repented of it, and received the forgiveness of God she was cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, Christ Jesus. Her baptism was outward *evidence* of that inner reality and publicly identified her before her fellow inmates as a Child of God. Baptism didn't make her clean. God's grace did!

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is like that. It is an *event* in that, by Spirit Baptism, we are made members of the Body of Christ and freed to draw upon the refreshing, re-invigorating power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us as a result of this event. Spirit Baptism is also evidence in that through clear, convincing, external confirmation, or what I call “the baptizing quality” of a Spirit-filled life, we are publicly identified as being members of that Body. Each time we “drink of” and are “filled with” the Holy Spirit additional *evidence* is present. We naturally and

effortlessly produce the fruit of the Spirit, and as needed, the gifts of the Spirit are given for ministry to the Body and in the world.

### **Prophecy Fulfilled**

On the day of Pentecost that's precisely what happened. There was something about those recently born-again and now Spirit-filled followers of Christ which identified them as being different. Not everyone present understood the significance of this difference. Some thought they were drunk. Nevertheless, *evidence* was presented. It was objective and recognizable to the people around them. As Peter explains later in his sermon, it was the overflow of the Holy Spirit expressed in boldness, attractiveness and, not incidentally, the ability to speak languages they had never learned.

For you and me, the overflow of the fullness of the Spirit which identifies us as being Spirit-filled members of the Body may not be as spectacular, but believe me, it is every bit as significant. We may or may not be gifted to speak languages we have never learned, but we are given a new language. It is the language of love. Agape love. God-like love. Self-giving love. It is a language which is instantly understood by anyone, anywhere, anytime. When we are "filled with the Holy Spirit," we speak the language of love in an attractive and courageous way. To the discerning, it identifies us as being different. Not everyone understands this difference and it may require an explanation, as it did on the day of Pentecost, but that's where a winsome word of testimony may win someone to Christ.

### **A True Story**

While Spirit Baptism as evidence is objective, it is not always subjective. Often we are not aware of the baptizing quality or evidence of our being filled with the Holy Spirit. A young woman came to my study and asked for a prayer of healing and deliverance from attitudes and manners of speech which were destroying her marriage. I shared what God had done in my life. I asked her if she wanted him to do the same for her. "Yes." "When?" "Now." "OK!" Together, with another woman present, we prayed and God healed her. God changed her attitudes. She came under the control of the Holy Spirit. It was objectively evident by the love in her eyes and the softness in her speech.

She went home where things had been so tough. A few days later she called me and said, "Dr. John, it isn't working. Things are as stressful as ever. I haven't blown my stack like I used to, but things are so uncomfortable." I said, "Hang in there. Keep choosing to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. God's promises are true." A few days later the telephone in my office rang. It was her husband asking for an appointment. "Pastor," he said, "something has happened to my wife. She's a different woman. Even her speech has changed! I don't know what's happened to her, but whatever it is, I want it to happen to me."

I wish I could assure you that *evidence* of your being filled with the Holy Spirit will be seen and responded to within a week. It doesn't always happen that quickly. You may have to "hang in there" for months, even years. But God's promises are true. There is something beguiling and beautiful, eye-catching and ear-arresting about a Spirit-filled child of God who lives and talks the language of love. It's overwhelming. When I'm with such people, I want to be like them. I want that *evidence* to be seen in my life, too. I want the love of Jesus to shine through my eyes, be heard in my speech, and be seen by my actions.

You do too, right? Then give all you know of yourself to all you know of him and the miracle will happen. The filling will come. Through the baptizing quality of a Spirit-filled life, evidence will be produced. And, empowered by the Spirit, you will begin speaking the language of the Spirit: the language of love.

## **The Church Established - Part 4**

Acts 2:14-41

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Key Truth: God's Power Equips His People to Proclaim Normal Christianity

Attribute: God is Power-full

### **Is There a Bridge over Troubled Waters?**

According to scripture, all born-again believers are charismatic in that all members of the Body of Christ have been gifted by the Holy Spirit to do the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11-13). Indeed all Christians can, and should, expect to experience manifestations of the Spirit as "the dancing hand of God" gently but powerfully moves into life situations to gift his children to do his will and work in those situations.

The preceding paragraph is likely to displease hyper-dispensationalists who teach the ministries and gifts of the Holy Spirit were for another era and ceased to function with the book of Acts. I do not believe the Bible teaches that. On the other hand, to urge that we exercise extreme care in using the expression the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and to refuse to link the gift of tongues with that term is likely to displease classical Pentecostals who teach "the baptism" is a second work of grace accompanied by the gift of tongues. I do not believe the Bible teaches that, either.

As a consequence, even as I begin, I know I am not going to please everyone. I do not wish to displease anyone. That would be neurotic. I certainly would not willfully offend anyone. That would be carnal. Hopefully, as I seek to develop a biblical theology for renewal in and by the Spirit, while it may not convince, hopefully it will clarify and together we will experience "the Spirit of unity in the bonds of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

### **Probing the Historical to Understand the Doctrinal**

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, together with the book of Acts, are essentially historical. They *describe* what happened. Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians and the other epistles--whether they be from Paul, Peter, John, James, Jude, or the unknown writer of Hebrews--are essentially doctrinal. They *explain* what happened. To grasp the full meaning of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we must make complete use of both the gospels, which are historical, and the epistles, which are doctrinal, so we not only know what happened, we understand what happened.

In the New Testament, there are six verses which make specific reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In addition, there is one reference which refers to "one baptism," (1 Corinthians 12:13), which can be shown to be the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Six of the seven verses are repetitions in one form or another of John's prophecy that there would, indeed, be such a baptism (Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16 and John 1:33). Subsequently, John's prophecy is twice restated in the book of Acts. Once by Jesus. Once by Peter. In Acts 1:5, Jesus applies John's prophecy to Pentecost and tells his disciples this baptism will come to them "before many days." In Acts 11:16, Peter quotes our Lord's quotation of John's prophecy, using it to defend his rather un-Jewish experience with the household of Cornelius, a Gentile.

While six of the New Testament references to the baptism of the Holy Spirit are found in the



historical books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts, none of these tells us what Spirit Baptism is. To grasp that, at least in part, we turn to First Corinthians, where Paul gives this explanation: “For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one Body -- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

With this text defining the phrase for us, we discern Spirit Baptism as an *event* whereby newborn Christians are made members of the Body of Christ, are united forever with one another and with him, are given access to the Holy Spirit so as they “drink of” or continually appropriate the Spirit, they are energized and equipped to live the Christian life.

Classical Pentecostalism, however, draws a distinction between 1 Corinthians 12:13 and the other six verses found in the gospels and Acts, all of which refer to baptism by Jesus with the Holy Spirit. We are, indeed, baptized by the Spirit into one Body, they argue; but that does not mean all of us have the experience of a second baptism with the Holy Spirit. On the surface, they seem to be correct. We are saved, step one. Later we receive “the baptism,” step two. But does that represent God’s ideal for us, and more to the point, is that accurate biblical exegesis? That is the question.

### **In, By, or With?**

The sentence structure in all seven references to Spirit Baptism is the same. The Greek preposition used in all seven verses is the same. In the six references to John’s prophecy “en” is translated, “He will baptize you *with* the Holy Spirit.” In 1 Corinthians 12:13, the preposition is exactly the same, but “en” is translated “by one Spirit were we all baptized *in* one body.” To translate “en” as meaning with, in, or by is permissible. It can be used in different ways. But to insist this is proof of a second baptism is to stand on shaky exegetical ground, because the preposition is interchangeable.

Suppose a couple visits your home. You ask the woman, “How did you get here?” She may say, “*In* the car or *by* car or *with* my husband,” any of which would be correct. So you can see it is highly inadvisable to build so basic a doctrine as two baptisms in the Holy Spirit upon the uncertain footing of one little word which has three distinct, but essentially synonymous, meanings. This is especially true if, as I hope to demonstrate, there is a biblically sensitive and truly satisfying alternative solution.

### **Two Baptisms or Two Meanings of Baptism?**

The concept of two baptisms seems to be at loggerheads with Ephesians 4:4,5 where Paul describes the basis of our unity in Christ. “There is one Body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.” Doesn’t it seem strange that if there were a second baptism with the Holy Spirit, which is absolutely essential to the spiritual life, health and growth of Christian believers, the scripture only speaks of one baptism? Wouldn’t it seem logical that somewhere in the New Testament there would be direct, specific, and clear reference to two baptisms, plus definitive instructions as to how one enters into that second work of grace? Yet nowhere in scripture is there reference to a second baptism. Instead, the specific biblical teaching is: the baptism is one. How are we to reconcile scripture and experience? We do so by recognizing “baptism” is one word with two meanings. A *literal* meaning in which a real person is placed in real water. Here baptism as an *event* occurs. A second and *symbolic*

meaning provides outer confirmation of an inner transformation. Here baptism as *evidence* occurs.

### **Biblical Baptisms**

As we learned in our teaching on Acts 2:1-13, these literal and symbolic meanings are true of John's baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17) and Believer's Baptism (Romans 6:3,4). Similarly, with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, real people, new-born Christians, are baptized by the Spirit into a real entity, the Church (1 Corinthians 12:13a). This gives them access to the empowering work of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13b) so they can successfully live the new lifestyle to which they have been called. It is a *literal* happening and Spirit Baptism as an *event* occurs.

But the baptism of the Holy Spirit has a second and *symbolic* function. When Christian believers "drink of the Spirit" as 1 Corinthians 12:13 exhorts all believers to do, the baptizing quality or tangible, visible, measurable *evidence* of their Spirit-filled lives is present for all to see. They are identifiably and recognizably born-again, Spirit-filled, growing Christians.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not a once and for all time experience. Rather, Spirit Baptism consists of the many recurring occasions when *evidence* automatically manifests itself as Christian believers go on being "filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). Each occasion naturally and spontaneously produces *evidence* in the form the fruit of the Spirit and releases the gifts of the Spirit to do the work of the ministry.

### **Why There Appear to be Two Baptisms**

A look at a sequence of historical happenings which preceded Pentecost may help explain why, as classical Pentecostalism insists, there appear to be two baptisms.

One, Jesus was born (Matthew 1:18-25). Two, thirty years later John the Baptist arrived on the scene, called people to repentance expressed by water baptism, and prophesied One would come after him who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Jesus was baptized by John, identifying himself with the cause of righteousness (Matthew 3:1-17). Three, after 40 days of temptation (Matthew 4:1-11), the ministry of Jesus began. The disciples followed him and crowds gathered to hear him as many healings and deliverances occurred (Matthew 4:17-25). Four, roughly 3 years later, Christ's ministry reached a crescendo in his death and resurrection (Matthew 27:1-28:20).

Five, sometime after his resurrection, Jesus came to his disciples, breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). In that moment they were born-again. The very same Spirit who impregnated Mary to produce the *person* of Christ through her, now indwelt the disciples to reproduce the *character* of Christ in them. Six, simultaneously, the baptism of the Holy Spirit as *event* occurred and the Body of Christ, his Church, was born. Paul later interpreted this *event* as follows: "By one spirit were we all baptized into one body" (1 Corinthians 12:13a), thereby including the Corinthians, and all other Christians, in the reality of that historical happening.

Seven, before his ascension several weeks later, Jesus promised a baptism by the Holy Spirit as *evidence* (Acts 1:5). This would occur "before many days" Jesus said, when they "receive power" and become his "witnesses" (Acts 1:8). When filled with the Holy Spirit these new

Christians would be publicly identified by external, tangible, measurable *evidence* as belonging to Jesus. Eight, Jesus ascended to the Father (Acts 1:9-11). Nine, the disciples devoted the next ten days to prayer and reconciliation (Acts 1:12-14) preparing themselves to receive “the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4).

Ten, the day of Pentecost arrived and they were “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:1-13). There were outward manifestations, clear and convincing *evidence* or what I call “the baptizing quality” of their Spirit-filled lives, which publicly identified them as witnesses for Christ. There was objective *evidence*, discernible by others, that they belonged to him. The Church, which had been born in the upper room, was publicly unveiled and began to grow. Through Peter’s sermon Normal Christianity was proclaimed (Acts 2:14-40) and because of their positive response, Normal Christianity was experienced by 3000 people (Acts 2:41-47).

Number five in this sequential listing is the baptism of the Holy Spirit as an *event*. Number ten is the baptism of the Holy Spirit as *evidence*. Because there is a time-line separation of these two, there appear to be two baptisms. However, historically, in which things happen sequentially, there is no other way this could have taken place for the disciples. It occurred, historically, in stages. A graphic may help you see this flow of happenings as they relate to the disciples and the unfolding ministry of the Holy Spirit.

### **HISTORICALLY - The Disciples (Gospels/Acts)**

1. The disciples began following Christ. While they were becoming enlightened souls they remained spiritually “dead through the trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1).
2. Following the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus appeared to them in the upper room, breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). At that point, an *event* or step function occurred. They were transformed. They were made alive in Christ and received everlasting life (Ephesians 2:4-7; John 3:16).
3. Paul later interprets this *event* or step function as being “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13). They were made members of the extended body of Christ, the Church, and simultaneously gained access to the Holy Spirit for empowerment to live abundant lives.
4. During the following ten days these newborn members of the Body put more and more of themselves under the control of the Holy Spirit.
5. At Pentecost we’re told they were “all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4). The Holy Spirit who had moved them from one level of life to another through an *event* or step function called being born again, began to produce *evidence* or spike functions in the form of sudden, transient surges of power as they come under the Spirit’s control and empowerment.

Acts 2:4 doesn’t call what occurred on Pentecost “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” but that’s exactly what it was! Spirit Baptism as *evidence* occurred as spike functions provided outward evidence of the inner transformation which had occurred as an *event* or step function when they were born again and received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

As we shall learn, the disciples were “filled with the Spirit” again and again. Each time they

chose to be under the control of the Holy Spirit there were surges of power or spike functions which enabled them to operate in the power of the Spirit and the *evidence*, or baptizing quality of those Spirit-filled moments, made them identifiably Christian.

6. As they became more and more sensitized to the ministry of the Spirit, the times between their being “filled with the Spirit” and being “carnal” grew shorter. Their “walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16) became more and more consistent. They experienced what I call Normal Christianity. They were in an almost constant state of being identified with him.

### **The Disciples Experience Is Not Normative**

Because of this essential historical flow, the experience of the disciples is not normative for you and me. What happened to them sequentially could not have happened in any other way!

Before they could be born-again as an *event* or step function and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, Jesus had to die for their sins and be raised again for their justification (Romans 4:25). Before they could be filled with the Holy Spirit verified by *evidence* or spike functions, the Holy Spirit had to come. Hence, for the disciples the new birth as an *event* or step function, and the *evidence* or spike functions of their being filled with the Holy Spirit, were separated by a span of time. Therefore the disciples experience is not normative for us.

Unfortunately, for many of us, Spirit Baptism as *event* and Spirit Baptism as *evidence* do occur as separate experiences because we have not been taught Normal Christianity. We have not been told we can receive eternal life and simultaneously experience abundant life (Acts 2:38-39, 41-47) by learning to ingest or, in the vivid language of 1 Corinthians 12:13b, “drink of one Spirit” to the point of fullness so we enjoy the best God has to offer here and now!

A lot of Christians are like the man who went to a fortune teller. “You’re going to be sick and miserable until you’re forty,” he was told. “What happens then?” he asked. The fortune teller replied, “By then you’ll be used to it.” Unfortunately, many of us have become used to living sub-Christian lives.

### **EXPERIENTIAL - How It Usually Is (with you and me)**

Looking at the graphic, notice:

1. Like the disciples, we are born into this world “dead in trespasses and sin” (Ephesians 2:1). We hear the Good News that there is salvation in Jesus Christ and we receive him as our Savior.
2. We are born again, or transformed, and come alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:5).
3. Spirit Baptism as an *event* or step function occurs and we are made part of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12a). Unfortunately we do not hear or, if we do, we do not heed the rest of the gospel that, along with our new birth, we are given the right to “drink of (the) one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13b) and thereby receive the resources required to successfully live and enjoy our life in Christ.
4. We try to live the Christian life in the energy of our flesh, apparently believing our up and

down, on and off, roller coaster experience is Normal Christianity. It is not! It may be average. It is not normal.

5. Hopefully, at some point in time, we are introduced to the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. We learn “to drink of” and be filled with the Holy Spirit. We decide to place ourselves under the Spirit’s control.

6. Spirit Baptism as *evidence* occurs. Filled with the Holy Spirit, spike functions begin to take place. As we learn to place ourselves under the Spirit’s control continually, we get off the roller coaster. We begin to experience times of remarkable effectiveness in our witness for the Lord. What I call “fill-baps” begin to occur. Each of these fillings baptizes us and the fruit and gifts of the Spirit as *evidence* publicly identify us as belonging to Christ.

7. Hopefully, over time, we learn to “live by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16-25). We become so sensitized by the Spirit we are instantly able to recognize when we have “carnaled out” and quickly choose to come back under the Spirit’s control again.

### **Power On/Power Off**

The fullness of the Spirit makes us vulnerable to not being full of the Spirit. Let me show you what I mean. A glass full of water will, even though no one drinks or pours from it, begin to empty through the process of evaporation. Similarly, the moment we are filled with the Spirit, the demands of life begin to drain us. Fortunately, the presence of Power makes us aware of the absence of Power! The goal is to become so uncomfortable when we move from a spiritual to a carnal state we immediately make it right. Over time, the process of early detection and repentance begins to quicken and more and more we are at one with him.

A lighted lamp provides an example. It would appear, at first glance, that light waves are constant. However, if the flow of power is reduced, the light begins to flicker. We discover light waves are not constant, but intermittent. Similarly, our walk in the Spirit is not constant. When the flow of Power is reduced because we choose to walk in the flesh, our effectiveness as “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14) begins to flicker and grow dim. Our times of “walking in the Spirit” are, like light rays, intermittent. But, and here’s the good news, each time of fullness in the Spirit baptizes us with a brighter witness. We are more clearly Christian.

To help you grasp this truth I’ve invented the little phrase “fil-baps.” With each filling, baptism as *evidence* occurs and these “fil-baps” are the natural and inevitable outer manifestations of our inner decision to be ruled by him.

### **IDEALLY - How It Should Be (Acts 2:1-47)**

If the experience of the disciples is not normative for Christians today--shaped as it was by an inescapable historical flow--what is normative for us? The experience of the 3000 who were converted on the day of Pentecost! Think about it.

1. They began that day the way they had from the date of their natural birth: spiritually dead. They were confronted by authentic Christians. They heard Peter proclaim Normal Christianity: they could not only be saved and have eternal life, they could also be filled with the gift of the Spirit and enjoy abundant life.

2. They believed the message, made a positive response to it, and were made alive in Christ.
3. Spirit Baptism as an *event* or step function occurred. They became part of the Body of Christ and were given access to the Spirit and began to “drink of” or appropriate the Spirit.
4. Spirit Baptism as *evidence* or spike functions also took place as they came under the direction and control of the Holy Spirit.
5. Spirit Baptism as *event* and Spirit Baptism as *evidence* occurred simultaneously!
6. Each time of fullness in the Spirit spike functions or *evidence* reinforced their desire to “walk in the Spirit.” To be continually under his control.
7. There was no “the end” for them and there must not be a “the end” for us. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was and is a process without an end. It is a moment by moment, step by step, situation by situation, life long process of choosing to be under the control of the Holy Spirit.

“To be continued” is a more accurate way of describing a Spirit-filled life because “walking in the Spirit” was and is the result of continuing choices on the part of growing Christians to be led by the Spirit one step at a time! That’s the way it can and must be for us if we are to enjoy abundant life. All too often it isn’t. Why? We are not told about Normal Christianity and therefore have no expectation that we can be saved by the blood of Jesus and filled by the Holy Spirit at the same time.

### **The Biblical Meaning of Being Filled**

In scripture, people were filled with many things. They were “filled with wrath” (Luke 4:28), “filled with fear” (Luke 5:26), “filled with madness” (Luke 6:11), “filled with wonder” (Acts 3:10), “filled with Satan” (Acts 5:3), “filled with grace and power” (Acts 6:8). In each case, people were under the influence and control of wrath, fear, madness, wonder, Satan, grace and power. In each case, they gave outward evidence of being controlled by that spirit to which they had given control.

Similarly, to be “filled with the Holy Spirit” is to be under the domination or control of the Holy Spirit. It is to willfully, deliberately and repeatedly choose to allow him to use our mind to express his thoughts, our emotions to express his attitudes, our will to express his decisions.

### **Don’t Ask. Choose!**

Therefore, we should not be asking for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we should be choosing the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We should be deliberately, consciously, and repeatedly deciding as a process to place our self under the domination, control and influence of the Holy Spirit. When we do that, the “baptism” just happens! Naturally, spontaneously and effortlessly we produce the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Outward *evidence* of the inward reality of our being dominated by him occurs. Excuse me, but hallelujah!

## The Church Established - Part 5

Acts 2:14-41

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Key Truth: God's Power Equips His People to Proclaim Normal Christianity

Attribute: God is Power-full

### More Than a Matter of Words

To some, our quest for a biblical theology of renewal in and by the Spirit is merely a matter of semantics. I understand. When I came into a deeper walk with Christ through the Spirit, I had no interest in trying to understand it or analyze it. I just wanted to enjoy it. Now, however, I know and must say it is not just a matter of words. It's a matter of theology and Biblical accuracy.

It is also a matter of bringing scriptural sanity to many devout believers who have come under a spirit of condemnation because they have not been exposed to thoughtful Bible teaching. These, who have sought "a second blessing" through tears and tarrying and have never yet experienced "it," meaning the gift of tongues, feel like second-class Christians.

Hopefully, if you are one of these, this study has cleared the air. You have already been blessed in Christ "with every spiritual blessing" (Ephesians 1:3). Your objective is not to seek something new, but to continually, patiently and persistently appropriate the blessing you already have.

Some years ago, Harold Bredison gave a most helpful illustration on television. He turned to the man interviewing him and said, "Here is title to an island in the Bahamas. I give it to you. Will you take it?" "Yes, I will. Thank you." "Now then," Harold continued, "you own the island. It's yours. However, you aren't enjoying it because you haven't started to use it. When you do you will begin to delight in that which is already yours . . . *by title*"

At your conversion, you received the *gift* of the Holy Spirit. You have title to abundant living in his power. What is required is not that you try to get something different, something new, another island so to speak, but that you begin to constantly, patiently and progressively *use*, and thus enjoy, the gift which is already yours . . . *by title!* This will happen when you stop trying to *get* more of the Spirit and begin to deliberately *give* more of yourself to the Spirit.

For the disciples, that happened at Pentecost. Acts 1:5,8 records Jesus' description of what *would* happen "before many days." The balance of chapter 1 reveals what the disciples did to prepare themselves. In Acts 2, Pentecost came! God's exact moment in history arrived and the disciples were all filled with or controlled by the Holy Spirit.

There was such freedom of expression, such deliverance from self-consciousness, such exuberant joy and intoxicating enthusiasm in the Spirit that some who observed them concluded they were drunk. The effect on, and the effect of, Spirit-filled people was tremendous! It was identifiable and recognizable. It showed publicly.

### **A Heartwarming Illustration**

“But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them . . .” (Acts 2:14).

“But *Peter*.” Wonderful words these. The most meaningful factor in the Pentecost experience to me, beyond the actual outpouring of the Holy Spirit, was not the sound “as of a mighty, rushing wind,” a kind of first-century super-sonic boom which got their attention. Nor was it the Presence “like fire” which distributed himself on each of them. Nor was it the miracle of using languages they had never learned. These were acts of God which required little or no participation on the part of the disciples themselves.

But, when *Peter* stood up to speak, when by *choice* he willingly and deliberately identified himself with the others, that was an act of courage in sharp contrast to the cowardice of which he had earlier been guilty. His performance on Pentecost is a magnificent demonstration of what being “*filled* with the Holy Spirit” really means. Peter witnessed boldly and proclaimed clearly the incredibly Good News of hope for tomorrow and help for today.

### **An Example of New Testament Preaching**

Peter’s sermon (Acts 2:15-40) is a model of brevity, clarity and certainty.

#### **Brevity: a 210 Second Sermon!**

If you read it aloud as a preacher might preach it, you will discover it is 31/2 minutes long. In that brief span of time, Peter disposes of the charge “they’re drunk.” “But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, ‘Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day’” (Acts 2:14-15).

The Jewish day began at 6 A.M. The third hour would be 9 o’clock in the morning. Being Pentecost, this was a Holy day when devout Jews devoted the early hours to prayer. “These men are not drunk,” Peter says, “it is only the third hour of the day!” Actually, what they were witnessing was a fulfillment of prophecy. In Acts 2:17, Peter explains, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.’”

These last days are with us! They are Gospel days. Good News days. Days of grace when “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). These are days when the whole world is awash with the activity of the Holy Spirit. He is convicting, converting and empowering people of all classes, colors and climes.

He is acting on behalf of “all flesh” as a resistance to the force of evil. Satan does not have free reign in the world today. Sometimes it seems like he does, but he doesn’t. The holy Spirit is restraining him. A day is coming when this “hand of restraint” will be removed, evil will run rampant, after which the day of the Lord will come. “. . . yea, and on my menservants and my maid-servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day” (Acts 2:18-21).



Obviously this prophecy was not fulfilled in its entirety on the day of Pentecost. The catastrophes mentioned here did not occur. They await the future. Between verses 18 and 19 is a great span of time called “the last days.” 2000 years, thus far, as *we* measure time. But just 2 days as *God* measures time (2 Peter 3:8). Eventually these last days, these days of grace when the Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh, will end. “The day of the Lord (will come)” and judgement will fall on the earth. Are we living in the last hours of these last days?

A young missionary, about to begin his first term of service, walked down the gangplank of the ship on which he had sailed to his assignment. A mass of directionless people milled around on the dock. After greeting the retiring missionary, whose place he was to take, he said, “It looks like I got here just in the nick of time.” “Oh, son, that’s exactly what I said 40 years ago when I first arrived.” “Yes, Sir,” the young man replied, “but you’ve got to admit the times are getting nicker and nicker” He’s right, you know. We are closer than ever to that great day.

### **Clarity: a Seven-point Sermon!**

Our Key Truth says, *God’s Power Equips God’s People To Proclaim Normal Christianity.*

In the simplest possible language Peter presents seven facets of Normal Christianity. “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know . . .” (Acts 2:22).

1. The Good News centers around a person, Jesus of Nazareth. Not a philosophy of life nor an ethical ideology. Not even a new religious system. A person! People have tried philosophies, ethical ideologies and religions without having their needs met. But no one has ever come to this *person*, Jesus of Nazareth, and entering into a personal relationship with him, turned away unsatisfied.
2. He is “a man,” Peter says. True humanity. Humanity as God meant humanity to be. As humankind was before the fall.
3. Indwelt and empowered, as he was, by the Spirit of God, this man did “mighty works and wonders and signs . . . in your midst.” By “mighty works” Jesus glorified God. By “wonders” which appealed to the five senses, Jesus attracted the attention of people. By “signs” the discerning saw the truth behind the “mighty works and wonders.” They grasped what Jesus was saying and how he was fulfilling prophecy.
4. “This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23). In his foreknowledge, God saw this person rejected and crucified by sinners. In his wisdom, God incorporated that crucifixion into his plan of salvation. Jesus was not only crucified *by* sinners, he was crucified *for* sinners. His death upon the cross showed the extent to which sin will go taking, as it did, the loveliest person this world has ever known and completely crushing him. But the loving Father accepted that death as full and final payment for the sins of humankind.
5. God raised him from the dead, a fact Peter says which all 120 had personally witnessed. “But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it . . . this Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore

exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear” (Acts 2:24,32-33).

6. Jesus is the first person who ever entered heaven on the merit of his own sinlessness. As a result, when he presented himself before the Father, he received “the promise of the Father,” the gift of the Holy Spirit, which he, in turn, “poured out” producing the incredible results everyone present was able to “see and hear.”

This Spirit was and is being poured out on “all flesh,” male and female, old and young, those in Peter’s generation and now, as we come to the end of this second millennium, our own generation. As a result, “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Not only saved, but empowered! *That’s* a feature of the Good News many Evangelicals have failed to properly articulate and appropriate. Not only can one be saved and have eternal life, he or she can and *must* be filled with the Holy Spirit to enjoy abundant life. Here. Now.

7. This person, Jesus, who has been crucified, raised from the dead, and glorified, is declared by God to be Israel’s Messiah. “Let all the house of *Israel* therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36).

You killed him, Peter says. You crucified your Messiah. You were offered the King and the Kingdom and rejected them both. God is now giving you a second offer. Do not reject it. “Save yourselves from this crooked generation” (Acts 2:40).

### **Certainty: a Jewish Sermon for a Jewish Congregation**

Peter’s sermon on Pentecost was *to* Jews and *for* Jews. He says, “Men of *Israel* . . .” (Acts 2:22). Jesus had commissioned his disciples to first preach the gospel “in Jerusalem,” that is, to *Jews*. It’s important to remember this sermon was to Jews and for Jews, lest we slip into a devastating doctrinal error and assume salvation is by baptism, which it is not.

While this sermon is a model of brevity and clarity, it is also a model of certainty with respect to *Jewish* converts. When this *Jewish* audience heard they had killed their Messiah, they were profoundly moved and asked, “Brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Aware he was speaking to a *Jewish* congregation, Peter answered, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of *Jesus Christ* for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Earlier in this study “baptism” was defined as a word with two meanings: *event* and *evidence*. Peter required both. Through baptism as an *event* they would be forgiven and receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Through baptism as *evidence* they would publicly confess him whom they had earlier rejected.

“Repent!” Peter told his fellow Jews to do an about face in their *attitude* toward Jesus. To change their way of *thinking* about him. To see him as their promised Messiah, and then be baptized in *his* name. These who had publicly rejected him must publicly confess him in *baptism*! The implications were awesome. Peter was asking them to die to everything precious to them: family, friends, vocation, earthly security. As *Jewish* believers, the moment they publicly confessed allegiance to Jesus Christ in baptism they would be cut off from the house of

Israel. Baptism in the name of *Jesus* was, and is, no small thing for *Jews*!

This prescription for salvation (Acts 2:38) is not God's way of dealing with Gentiles. The Philippian jailer, a Gentile, asked the same question. "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Paul's response was, "*Believe* in the Lord, Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). No reference to being baptized "in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins" as in Acts 2:38. Unlike *Jewish* believers for whom a public confession of Christ by being baptized in *his* name was necessary to demonstrate the integrity of their decision to honor Jesus as their Messiah, for Gentiles' salvation came through a simple decision to *believe* in Jesus as their Savior and Lord (Acts 19:1-5).

"So those who received his words were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). They completely changed their attitude about Jesus. They publicly confessed allegiance to him whom they had earlier rejected. In one all-encompassing transaction they were baptized by the Spirit as an *event* or step function. They were forgiven, born-again, received the *gift* of the Holy Spirit, the indwelling presence of God himself, and were made members of the Body of Christ. *Simultaneously*, they were baptized with the Holy Spirit as *evidence* or spike functions and the baptizing quality of their Spirit-filled lives identified them as born-again, Spirit-controlled, growing Christians (Acts 2:41-47). More about that in our next study.

### **The 3000 Are Models for Us**

In one great *event* or step function we receive Jesus as our Savior, are born-again, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. *Simultaneously* we can, and must, choose to be controlled by the Holy Spirit so empowered by him *evidence* or spike functions will validate the new life to which we have been called. In that way "the Baptism of the Holy Spirit" as an *event* and as *evidence* will be our joy-filled *experience*.

If you are a pre-Christian, God's plan for you is not that you come to Christ and then plod along for days, weeks, months or years attempting, unsuccessfully, to live the Christian life in the energy of your flesh. Rather, it is God's desire that in one great, life-changing, life-empowering decision you take it all. Eternal life *and* abundant life!

If you have never entered into a personal relationship with Jesus, I invite you to God's ideal. I proclaim to you Normal Christianity: In one all-encompassing transaction you can choose to receive Jesus as your Savior *and* be filled with the Holy Spirit so Jesus also becomes your Lord. Then, as a born-again, Spirit controlled, growing Christian you will be to the world what Christ would be if he was here himself.

If you have been born-again but have never made a deliberate, conscious decision to be filled with the Holy Spirit, I invite you to make that decision *now*. I proclaim to you Normal Christianity. Having received the *gift* of the Holy Spirit at the time of your new birth you can, by an act of your will, place yourself under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit. By this first filling and many more to follow, you will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to be and to do. To be what Jesus would be, and do what Jesus would do, in every situation of life. "Be filled with the Holy Spirit!"

**Something to Think About**

An appropriate biblical reply to the question, “Have you been baptized in the Holy Spirit?” might well be, “You tell me! Am I?”

## **The Church Established - Part 6**

Acts 2:41-47

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Key Truth: God Provides His people with a Living Statement of Purpose

Attribute: God is Purposeful

What does a congregation of born-again, Spirit-filled, growing Christians look like? Our text provides some clues. In fewer than 110 words, Dr. Luke paints a lovely cameo of the Church as it began to grow and mature. “So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41).

### **The Church As Organism**

Added to what? Not church as we understand it. Church as institution had not yet taken shape. Peter’s sermon was only three and one-half minutes long. Hardly enough time to set forth a church charter. The disciples had been busy all day baptizing 3000 new converts. No time for them to form an organization. “You be president.” “No, I’ll be treasurer, you be president.” It was not *a* church to which they were added. It was *the* Church, the Body of Christ!

In the upper room Jesus had breathed on each of the disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” In that awesome but quiet moment the human spirit, which died when Adam sinned, came alive again. The disciples were changed from enlightened souls to quickened spirits. They were born anew into everlasting life. They received the gift of the Holy Spirit. He, in turn, baptized them into the Body of Christ and the Church *as organism* was born.

### **Understanding the Lingo**

The word “added” (Acts 2:41) means “to place alongside that which already exists in order to increase it.” The Church was not born on Pentecost. That beautiful birth occurred in the upper room on the night of our Lord’s resurrection. Following Peter’s powerful Pentecostal proclamation of Normal Christianity, three thousand souls were added to that which already existed, thereby increasing it!

The word “souls” (Acts 2:41) comes from a Greek root meaning: “persons or individuals.” Three thousand “persons” were added. Not names. Not disembodied spirits. Individuals! Each with a mind, emotions, and will, committed to Christ and his Kingdom. “And they devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47).

From these verses we took our Key Truth: *God Provides his People With A Living Statement Of Purpose*. Not just a purpose for living, but a *living* purpose! They were called to be actively, dynamically and energetically involved in instruction, fellowship, worship and expression.

“Devoted” (Acts 2:42) is a powerful word in Greek. It means they “persisted in” or “continually attended to.” With energetic earnestness, they faithfully learned and *kept on learning!* They “devoted themselves” to fellowship, worship, and expressions of their faith without interruption. They were not passive. They were actively involved.

### **Instruction**

What does a congregation of born-again, Spirit-filled, growing Christians look like? Consider this: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 1:42). The first article in their living statement of purpose was Instruction. Conversion is not an end, but a beginning. It is a crisis which originates a process. It has a beginning, but no end.

Few things have so severely damaged our enjoyment of a Christian lifestyle here and now than the concept of conversion as an end in itself. “It may be,” as William Barkley has said, “the end of a road, but it is most assuredly the beginning of another road.” A mile from my study is the Santa Fe Railroad yard. Suppose a locomotive assigned the task of pulling a train from Bakersfield to San Francisco is headed in the wrong direction: south instead of north. What’s to be done? An engineer climbs aboard, backs the locomotive down the track to the round house and places it on a huge turntable. Then, in one transforming action, the engine is slowly but surely turned around until it is headed north. That, however, is not the end of it. There is still a 400 mile journey ahead. The goal, to pull a train from Bakersfield to San Francisco, has yet to be achieved.

Conversion, with a capital “C,” is similar to an engine in the round house. In one transforming moment of confession, repentance, forgiveness and spiritual regeneration, we are turned around. The whole course of our life is changed. From that point on we are going in a different direction. Headed toward a new destination. But, that is not the end of it. There is still the goal of fulfilling our destiny which is to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29-30).

Having gone through the *crisis* of Conversion (singular with a capital “C”), we must now become involved in the *process* of conversions (plural with a small “c”). Bit by bit, step by step, trait by trait, characteristic by characteristic, we are engaged in the on-going process of “*being*” saved. Of going through one conversion after another as various parts of our person are brought under the Lordship of Christ; and, increasingly, we are fashioned after the likeness of our Lord.

Conversion is not an end in itself. It is the beginning of a lifestyle which more and more reflects the qualities and characteristics of Jesus.

### **A “Text-book Case” of Evangelism**

There is no direct mention of Evangelism in our text. The New Testament Church was evangelistic, to be sure, but not in the sense of a diet of soul-winning sermons followed by an invitation. The New Testament Church did its evangelizing on Main Street where the lost were. Nowhere does scripture support the practice of preaching salvation sermons to a church full of people who are already saved. Nor does it give credence to the concept of church as a soul-saving station where the preacher does all the witnessing and winning of people to Christ. No. No. No!

When first century Christians got together, it wasn’t to hear evangelistic sermons followed by an

invitation. They came to learn what they needed to know so they could go out into the highways and byways and win the lost. The sheep were to bring new lambs to life, not the shepherd. Their job, as individual Christians, was to attract the lost by a wholesome lifestyle and introduce them to Jesus in a simple, understandable way. They were learning what St. Francis of Assisi would later articulate: “Preach Christ always, if necessary use words.” Once new lambs were born, it was the task of the gathered body to disciple them into maturity. That’s what the New Testament Church did. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teachings” (Acts 2:42).

### **Eye Witness Sharing**

Initially this involved listening to the personal reflections of the apostles. *They had been* with Jesus. They had walked, talked, eaten and fellowshiped with him for three years. They knew him *personally*, and these new Christians wanted to learn about Jesus based on the apostle’s personal, intimate relationship with him.

That’s what the world wants from us today. It doesn’t want to hear our theories about Jesus. It doesn’t want to hear what somebody else has to say about Jesus. The world wants to hear what Jesus means to you and me *personally*. The world is hungry for our personal reflections upon Jesus, and what he is doing in our lives. As new lambs are born they need to be nurtured by eye-witness sharing of what Jesus means to us and is doing in us through the Holy Spirit.

### **Personal Growth Curriculum**

The apostles’ teaching also involved penetrating, soul-searching study of what we call the Old Testament. The New Testament did not yet exist. They spent their time in the Hebrew scriptures examining more than 600 prophecies regarding the Messiah and discovering how each of them had specifically and precisely been fulfilled in Christ. Later, these personal reflections and Hebrew scripture studies were formulated into a kind of curriculum which Paul calls “the standard of teaching.” “But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to *the standard of teaching* to which you were committed” (Romans 6:17).

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul says, “But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. Follow *the pattern of the sound words* which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; guard *the truth* that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit which dwells within us” (2 Timothy 1:12-15).

The reflections of the apostles and the early Church’s penetrating study of Hebrew scriptures became a kind of basic personal growth curriculum variously called *The Standard of Teaching*, *The Pattern of Sound Words*, or simply *The Truth*. Later still, much of this would become what we call the New Testament.

Today we must not spend time in intellectual discussions of various propositions *about* Christ. We must involve ourselves in *knowing* Christ. A primary way of doing that is through the study of Scripture. Knowledge of the written word, the Bible, will reveal the Living Word, Jesus (John 1:1-4), and gradually we will become the intelligent, effective witnesses we are called to be.

## Fellowship

What does a congregation of born-again, Spirit-filled, growing Christians look like? Consider this: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching *and koinonia*” (Acts 2:42b). The second article of their living statement of purpose was fellowship. What a lovely, but tragically misunderstood word that is. Lovely, because fellowship means that through conversion we cease to live in isolation. We not only become children of God, we become members of the family of God. We belong. We experience powerful and positive response to a deep need within each of us, the need for community.

A woman, well in her 80's, stopped by my study to say, “There is neither chick nor child in all this world who knows me or cares one wit about me.” “We care,” I said. “I sensed that,” she replied somewhat tentatively, “that’s why I’ve been coming to this Church. Tell me, why do you care?” I told her about our God who cares and upon whom we can cast all our cares because we know he cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). I told her about “the God of all comfort” who, by his presence in us through the indwelling Holy Spirit, equips us to “comfort others with the same comfort with which we have been comforted” (2 Corinthians 1:3). I told her about Jesus who met people where they were and helped them get to where they wanted and needed to be. She came into a personal, living relationship with the Lord and was baptized. As she came up out of the water, I hugged her and whispered, “Hi, Sister.” She gave me a big smile and replied, “Hi, Brother.” Then I pointed to the congregation and said, “Now you have a family of hundreds and hundreds of brothers and sisters to which you belong.” With tears streaming down her smiling face, she said, “I know, thank God, I know.”

## Learning a Love-style

Praise the Lord for this lovely word, *fellowship*. But, oh, how we abuse it. How shallow and superficial is our understanding of it. One of the reasons God has been able to get me committed to the building of a 35-acre Christian Life Center where all the legitimate needs of a Christian family can be met on one campus is because he has given me a vision of *fellowship*. I saw a great room, maybe we’ll call it The Centrum, a warm, inviting gathering place where this Body can break bread *together*. Fellowship *together*. Learn *together*. Worship and praise God *together*.

Our present situation, crowded as it is on less than one city block, militates against this. Walking down the hall a couple of Wednesday nights ago, I saw something which really blessed me. Two young people were sitting on the floor, back to back, their Bibles open, communing with one another. The Lord spoke a word into my spirit, “John, you’re looking at *koinonia*. What your seeing is true fellowship. That’s what my Church is to be about.”

Only moments before I had meandered through the dining room. Dinner was over and a dozen or so folks were sitting around talking. I overheard the shallow, superficial nature of their talk. There was no sharing about what Jesus meant to them or what Jesus was doing in their lives. They were involved in chit chat. There’s nothing wrong with chit chat. But let’s not call it Christian fellowship. Let’s not equate it with the kind of *koinonia* described in our text. True fellowship is expressed in sharing, loving and in ministering to one another in Jesus’ name.

True *koinonia* is what the early Church was about. The apostles had learned their lesson well. Jesus had said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another” (John 13:34).



He explained that his followers would be known by the way they related to each other. The disciples taught this love-style to new believers, and as they learned to live it out the Lord's goal for his body was achieved.

They found "favor with all the people" (Acts 2:47). There was something beautiful and beguiling about this kind of loving, sharing, ministering fellowship. It responded to a deep need in people. Their need for community. They wanted to be a part of it. "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47b).

### **Worship**

What does a congregation of born-again, Spirit-filled, growing Christians look like? Consider this: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, *to the breaking of bread and the prayers . . . and day by day, attending the temple together. . .*" (Acts 2:42, 46a).

The third article in their living statement of purpose centered on worship, "day by day." Worship to them was not a haphazard, occasional experience which they shared when it was convenient. When it didn't conflict with something else. When there wasn't something more interesting to do. Worship was a pattern of life for them. "Day by day" they shared it together.

### **The Decision to Worship**

As far as I'm concerned, it's inappropriate for a Christian family to decide on Saturday night or Sunday morning whether or not they will go to Church. If I understand the ideal set forth for us in this text, there should be *one* time when a family decides: "as for us and our household, we will serve the Lord." That settles the issue of Who is boss. Jesus is! It charts the course for how this particular family will function.

Occasionally, there will be a long weekend which provides an opportunity to visit friends or family, or enjoy the countryside. Then the question is, "How shall we plan this weekend to include an experience of worship (formal or otherwise) while we are away from the Body to which we belong?" The basic commitment has been made, you see. It's the exception, rather than the rule, to ask: "Shall we go to Church this weekend?"

"Day by day (they were) attending *the temple together*" (Acts 2:46). The fact they were in the temple makes it abundantly clear they were not renegades. They were not part of a subversive, underground movement set up to undermine Judaism. They were loyal Jews. Had the people of God, the Israelites, responded to the King and the Kingdom, there would have been such a dynamic, Spirit-filled ministry of evangelism around the world, the so-called "Church Age" would never have been needed. The King would have come and set up his Kingdom in the hearts of the Jewish people. Through a renewed Israel on fire for God and Godliness, the Good News of his love, acceptance and forgiveness would have spread throughout the earth like wildfire. Unfortunately, that did not happen. So the new Israel, the Church, was given the task of sharing the Good News of God's love and increasingly the extended Body of Christ became involved in God's work in the world.

### **Court-side Witnessing**

"Day by day attending *the temple together*" they were provided a tremendous opportunity to evangelize. The temple was a cosmopolitan place. It housed the Holy of Holies and the Holy

Place. It also included the Court of the Gentiles where everyone was welcome, and the potential for witnessing was enormous. That's where the people were. The people who needed to hear the Good News. So, that's where believers went "*together.*" Being *together* fortified their commitment, and strengthened their witness. It also fired their enthusiasm.

They were united by the same *principles*, "the apostle's teaching" (Acts 2:42a).

They were united by the same *practices*, "the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42b).

They were united by the same *privileges*, "fellowship" (Acts 2:42c) and the opportunity to give and receive as they "had all things in common" (Acts 2:44).

I like football. One of the things I like best is having a great crowd of people enjoying the game with me. The fan who sits in front of me up at the stadium is Renegade Rooter #1. He's terrific to watch. I remember the night I first saw him. He was jumping up and down, waving his arms and yelling, "Go get 'em 'Gades' Rip 'em 'Gades.' Go, Gades, go! Go, Gades, go!" And that was before the kickoff! He's on fire for the Bakersfield College Renegades. I doubt if he'd be that active at home watching the game on TV. But in a crowd, caught up in the enthusiasm and excitement of it, he's on fire'

I enjoy good music. A few years ago, Lucille and I were in Salzburg, Austria. We went to 16 concerts in three weeks. It was incredible. Only one ticket was available to our group for the Vienna Symphony's program of Strauss waltzes. A drawing was held and I got it. Wow! I didn't know a waltz could be so exciting. The lilt and lift of the music was fantastic. I'll never forget it. Part of the wonder was having a crowd of people involved with me in what was going on in Das Gross Festspiel Haus. When the concert ended we gave the orchestra a standing ovation which lasted a half-hour! The applause went on and on and on. All of us were excited about hearing one of the world's great orchestras play some of the world's great music.

It was something like that in the early Church. When they gathered together, their enthusiasm for Jesus was electric. They picked up encouragement and wonder and excitement from their fellow believers. This, in turn, enhanced their witness. They were a tiny minority surrounded by a sea of opposition. White buttons on a multi-colored shirt. But by witnessing together they were fortified in that witness. Rubbing elbows with other Christians gave them courage and strength.

### **The Church in Our house**

"... breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God..." (Acts 2:46b, 47a). Public worship opportunities were few and far between. It wasn't long before organized opposition hunted and haunted them. For the most part their worship occurred in the privacy of their homes. In domestic settings. Amid family and friends where, with gladness of heart and generosity of spirit, they expressed their love for the Lord and one another. They were one. No snobbery. No elitism. No social superiority.

They were happy people. Contented and cheerful. Continually praising God and "having favor with all the people." The establishment hated them, but ordinary folks loved them. There was something enticing and intriguing about this Spirit-filled bunch which attracted others to them. Without "church" as we know it, they learned to turn every meal they shared together into a worship experience. Every loaf of bread served to remind them of the broken body of our Lord.

Every glass of wine helped them recall his blood shed upon the cross. His sacrifice for them. His claim upon them. They were developing a Christian lifestyle. They were learning to see and express Jesus in everything, everywhere, all the time.

Prayer was not only a pattern of life, it was their source of power for life. They quickly discovered they could not live this new lifestyle in the energy of their flesh. But, better than that, they knew they didn't have to! They had heard about and believed in Normal Christianity. They knew they were not only saved and had eternal life, they were also empowered by the Holy Spirit to enjoy abundant life here and now.

So they prayed. Not so much in the sense of asking God for things, but in the sense of bringing things and the absence of things to God so their circumstances, whatever they be, were under the seal of his guidance and his blessing.

### **Expression**

What does a congregation of born-again, Spirit-filled, growing Christians look like? Consider this: "And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles" (Acts 2:43). Last, but not least, their living statement of purpose involved expression.

The "fear" described is best understood as "awe." They were not in a state of dread or terror. Rather, they were overwhelmed with Holy wonder at what God was doing in their midst. And, they *continued* to be in a state of awe before him. A more precise translation would be: "Holy wonder came and kept on coming upon every soul; and many signs and wonders were continually being done through the apostles" (Acts 2:43).

The New Testament Church was motivated by an unsophisticated singleness of purpose. Empowered and increasingly purified by the Holy Spirit who dwelt within them, these newly re-born believers sought to exalt Christ and glorify God. As a result, the general public was amazed and moved to ask questions about what they heard and saw happening. This led to natural, spontaneous sharing of their faith by the members of this fledgling fellowship of believers.

### **Meeting People's Needs**

Then, too, expression took the form of relevant response to one another's needs. "And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:44,45). Some have used these verses to suggest the first century Church was an economically communistic society. Not so. Atheistic communism says: "What's yours is ours, we'll take it." New Testament Christianity says: "What's ours is yours, we'll share it."

Followers of Christ were motivated by a deeply spiritual commitment to help each other. Their actions were voluntary, not compulsory. They were believers *in* God, not deniers *of* God. They sought to glorify him, not negate him.

Furthermore, their giving was continual and on an as needed basis. They did not take their property and goods, put it together in "the mother of all garage sales," and create a common treasury out of which to dole money to people. Rather, on occasion, they disposed of this item,

shared that possession, and as needs arose distributed goods among themselves.

Others were impressed by this. They liked it and wanted to be part of it. Which is to say, the early Church evangelized, not because the apostles preached evangelistic sermons and gave invitations, but because these born-again, Spirit-filled, growing Christians lived a winsome lifestyle. It wasn't other-worldly. It was related to the here and now. It wasn't gloomy. It was glorious. It was so winsome and appealing, others just had to be a part of it. “. . . praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

There was something beautiful about that bunch of Spirit-filled believers. God grant that *this* bunch, *our* bunch, will be exactly like *that* bunch: filled to overflowing with the Spirit! By conscious, deliberate, daily decisions to be under the direction of the Holy Spirit, may we become a model of what a congregation of born-again, Spirit-filled, growing Christians looks like: a people persistent in devotion to instruction, fellowship, worship and expression.

## The Church Established - Part 7

Acts 3:1-26

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Key Truth: God's Power Appropriated Through Faith will Glorify Jesus

Attribute: God is Faithful

God has given his people a living statement of purpose. Not a purpose for living, though it is that to be sure, but a *living* purpose. An exciting, dynamic, energetic, ever-expanding awareness of who we are, and why we are here. Put simply, our living statement of purpose is this: As born again, Spirit filled, growing sons and daughters of God, we exist to be to the world what Christ would be if he were here himself.

From our study of chapter 2 we learned the lost are not won because a preacher preaches an evangelistic sermon to a cluster of believers. The book of Acts does not support the traditional evangelical American methodology of salvation sermons preached to a church full of saved people followed by an invitation. The lost, the scripture makes clear, are won through the evangelistic lifestyle of a people filled with the Holy Spirit. A lifestyle which is so beautiful and natural, so simple and down to earth, so eye-catching and heart-stopping, the sinking, searching people of the world are not only intrigued by it, they are attracted to it. "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2: 46, 47).

This accolade is not just to the twelve, or even the 120, but also the 3,000 who on the day of Pentecost met Jesus in a life-changing way. They experienced Normal Christianity. They not only received the forgiveness of sin and everlasting life in eternity to come, but through the gift of the Holy Spirit they were empowered to have abundant life here and now. So, filled with the Holy Spirit they began to develop an evangelistic lifestyle which was so attractive, so inviting, so winning, people were drawn to it and saved by it.

So I repeat, the lost are not saved through the evangelistic sermons of a preacher so much as through the evangelistic lifestyle of a congregation full of born again and spirit-filled growing Christian. People like yourself who are filled with the Holy Spirit, rather than by being filled with fear or timidity or shyness or self-consciousness. Instead of being dominated by those negative emotions which turned them inward rather than outward, they were filled with the very spirit of Christ, himself, and their evangelistic lifestyle led more of the lost and lonely to follow Jesus.

When the lost were won, they were discipled into spiritual maturity by participating in the life of a church devoted to instruction, fellowship, worship and expression. "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles" (Acts 2:42,43).

The New Testament Church was a place where something was happening. It was a place where

faith was being expressed and Jesus was being glorified through this example of the power of God appropriated through faith. And when we, individually and collectively, live out this living statement of purpose, God validates our life message by a life of fruitful ministry.

Our text divides itself neatly into two portions. Acts 3:1-10 record a miracle God used to validate the integrity and credibility of the church, the body of Christ. Acts 3:11-26 record a message Peter preached to explain the miracle.

Picking up the story at verse one, we find Peter and John behaving like good Jews, working within the system and going to the temple to pray. They have not yet gotten hold of the incredible truth that because of the indwelling presence of Christ in them, *their* body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and, therefore, superseded the temple in Jerusalem. That insight will come later on. But now they are operating within a system which was familiar to them, and at the hour of prayer are at the temple where they are confronted by a physically disabled man.

### **The Church's Mission**

The first three verses of Acts 3 identify our mission. "Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at that gate of the temple which is called beautiful to ask alms of those who entered the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to enter into the temple, he asked for alms" (Acts 3:1-3).

Our mission as the body of Christ is to minister to the needs of lame humanity. Lame, the scripture says, from birth. To me it's a waste of time to discuss how humanity came to be lame. It is lame, and in whatever form we find it we must respond to that lameness. There are some who are physically lame, and we must be sensitive to that physical need. There are some who are emotionally lame, who are crippled by attitudes of bitterness, resentment and unforgiveness which are keeping them imprisoned, and we need to be sensitive to them.

There are people who are intellectually handicapped. They are captives of thought forms and philosophical systems which do not contribute to the welfare and well being of people. There are those who are volitionally crippled. They are imprisoned by a set of priorities and values which deny them the ability to make decisions worthy of a child of God.

There is a spiritual lameness within all people. We are all lame from birth. We are all without that life principle which enables us to be what God wants us to be, and wherever we find this lameness it is our ministry as the body of Christ to respond to it. It's my personal conviction that a credible body of Christ will present itself as a great Christian Life Center which is the headquarters for a whole range of ministries designed to respond to the physical, intellectual, emotional, volitional and spiritual needs of people.

This, then, is our mission: lame humanity. People don't like to confront their lameness. They don't like to talk about it. They like to avoid it. They have all kinds of neat little ways of making it seem something other than it is. Like the wealthy Texan who stipulated in his will that he was to be buried in his Cadillac convertible with the top down, wearing his ten-gallon hat. The mortician made the arrangements and the grave diggers dug a huge grave. They drove the Cadillac up, lowered the top, moved the cadaver behind the wheel and put his ten-gallon hat on

him. A derrick picked up the automobile and lowered it into the grave. As it was being buried one of the grave diggers said, "Man, that's living!" Well, it isn't, of course. Despite all of our protestations to the contrary, humanity is lame. Terribly, tragically lame. And bringing the healing mercy and grace of God to them is our mission.

Peter and John, going into the temple, confronted this man who represented their mission, and Peter said to the man the only thing that makes sense in a situation like that: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

### **The Church's Message**

If the first three verses of Acts 3 describe our mission, the next three verses describe our message. "And Peter directed his gaze at him, with John, and said, 'Look at us.' And he fixed his attention upon them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, 'I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk'" (Acts 3:4-6).

Peter didn't have what the man wanted, but he gave him what the man needed. This should be a guide for us as we seek to express what God is doing in our midst. As we reach for language which is truly Biblical to express the moving of the Spirit among us, I want us to be sensitive to the fact that God does not always give us what we want, but what we need.

When I say this church is charismatic in the Biblical sense of the term, that's exactly what I mean. I want us to become comfortable with that word so we understand that a charismatic church is one in which every member is gifted by the Holy Spirit to minister to the body and in the world. When we talk about a deeper work of the Spirit in us, we should not talk about and invite people to experience the "baptism" of the spirit, we should be talk about and invite them to experience the "fullness" of the Spirit which rises to the point of overflowing, and expresses itself in ways which identify them as belonging to Jesus.

Some have come to me and said, "I asked for 'the baptism' and that's what I got, so I'm obliged to call it that." I understand the feeling and am sensitive to it. It borders just a bit on superstition rather than Biblical teaching. It's like a child who approaches his father and asks, "Daddy, I want a hot fudge sundae for dinner." The father goes to the refrigerator, gathers some good, nourishing food, sets it before his child. The child eats it and then goes out and says, "I've got the greatest father in the world. He gives me hot fudge sundaes for dinner." The father hears this and says, "No, my child, I didn't give you what you asked for, I gave you what you needed."

What we need is the "fullness" of the Holy Spirit. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. That is one of the categorical imperatives of the Christian faith. It is not an option. We are commanded to "*be* filled with the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to consciously and deliberately put oneself under his dominion. Under his control. Under his influence so we express his qualities in our life.

To be filled with wrath is to be controlled by wrath. To be filled with fear is to be controlled by fear. To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be controlled by love, and thus to bear the fruit of the spirit which *is* love. Peter didn't give the man what he wanted. He gave him what he needed. If

you'll pardon the pun, he asked for "alms" and got legs!

Peter said to this man, "I don't have anything that can help you maintain the lifestyle you're now living. I can't assist you in maintaining the existence of a cripple. But I can give you a new lifestyle. I can cure your crippled condition. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

That should be *our* message. We should be so prayed up and filled with the Holy Spirit we can say with boldness to lame humanity all around us, "Friend, you don't have to go on living like this. I know Someone who can cure your condition. I know Someone who can cancel your disability. His name is Jesus, and in the name of Jesus, walk!"

Jesus didn't come into this world of sin to make people comfortable in it. He didn't come into this world of misery to help people adapt to their misery by legitimizing it and making it legal. He came into this world to give them new life. To teach them how to stand up and walk tall as a child of God should. That's what we're here for. That's our mission, to win the lost and to give them a word of hope: in the name of Jesus, walk!

If we can't do that, maybe it's because we've forgotten how to get prayed up and stay prayed up. Acts 3:1 says, it was "the ninth hour." This made the third time that day Peter and John had been to the temple to pray. They had been there the third hour. They had been there the sixth hour. Now they were there the ninth hour. They were prayed up, and they stayed prayed up, because they had discovered prayer is power. Much prayer is much power. Little prayer is little power. No prayer is no power. If the church of Jesus Christ has lost the power to say to lame humanity: "in the name of Jesus, walk!" we better get down on our knees and spend whatever time it takes to get connected up so his power to heal can express itself in healing ways through us.

### **The Church's Method**

Not only does our text provide insight into our mission and our message, it also describes our methodology. "He (Peter) took him (the lame man) by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he walked and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him" (Acts 3:7-10).

### **Cooperation**

Our method is threefold in its construction. First, we are to work in cooperation with one another. Peter said, "Look on *us*." It's no accident the Spirit of God directed Peter and John to the temple. You couldn't find two more dissimilar people than they. Peter was a practical man. John was a poet. Peter was a doer of deeds. John was a dreamer of dreams. Peter was wild and reckless and impetuous. John was cautious and calm and stable. Peter was the kind of guy who leaped before he looked. John was the sort of man who looked before he leaped. And yet, God had them working together.

What is the scripture trying to teach us? That the Lord doesn't use a cookie cutter in producing his disciples. He is not a standard brand God who turns out standard brand witnesses. Each of us is to be our best self through the power of the Holy Spirit, and then link our lives with our



brothers and sisters as we work together in cooperation to fulfill our mission.

### **In the Name of Jesus**

Second, we are to work in the name of Jesus. There is power in that name, dear friend, because that name is the equivalent of the One who bears it. When we invoke the name of Jesus we are involving the power and person of Jesus himself, and there's redeeming, healing power in that name.

The story is told of a Quaker lady who went to the Indiana State Penitentiary to visit a woman inmate there. This prisoner was incorrigible. She had broken every rule of that great institution and had repeatedly been put in solitary confinement with chains on her wrists and ankles. The Quaker lady asked to see her. The inmate was brought into the visiting room dragging the chains behind her. The Quaker woman looked at her and said, "My sister." With an oath this old reprobate of a woman said, "You're not my sister." Then the Christian lady said, "I love you." With another oath the old woman said, "You don't love me. Nobody loves me." Then that dear Quaker lady did something you and I might find hard to do. She stooped over, took that old, life-worn face in her hands, lifted it up, and put a kiss on one cheek and then the other. Looking into those eyes she said, "Jesus loves you."

Those words sent the mind of that old woman spinning back across the years to a time when as a little girl she had sat on a crude wooden bench in a little country church and heard the song, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Suddenly under the power of Jesus' name the dam of her rebellion broke. Tears of repentance fell like rain and she dropped to her knees to receive the Savior. They took the chains off of her ankles and wrists and they were never put upon her again. From that day until the day she died, she moved about that penitentiary ministering to the wants and needs of others: a shining, gleaming, living trophy of the healing, transforming, saving power of Jesus' name.

### **Make Personal Contact**

We are to work in cooperation with one another and we are to work in the name of Jesus because there is power in that name. Third, we are to make contact with those in need.

"Peter took him by the right hand and lifted him up (Acts 3:7). Peter didn't practice arms length religion. He got involved, personally. He didn't wait for the man to struggle over to him, he went to the man in need, took him by the hand and he lifted him up. As a consequence of their "in touch" ministry the man was healed. Soon he was walking and leaping and praising God. Peter was responsive to the great commission to "go into all the world." Sending, waiting and giving are all important. We are to send. We are to wait. We are to give. But, *going* is ministering the New Testament way. *Going* is the standard. *Going* is what Peter and John did. And we are to *go* into all the world and minister to the lost and lonely, the lame of humanity, who are all around us.

### **Our Motivation**

The people who watched "were astounded" (Acts 3:11). Noticing they had been attracted by what God had done, Peter seized the opportunity to glorify Jesus and thus we discover our motivation. Our mission is lame humanity. Our message is "walk!" Our method is to work in cooperation with one another, and in the name of Jesus Christ make contact with those in need.

Our motivation is to ever and always glorify Jesus, and in the process to give him an opportunity to draw people to himself. Jesus said, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw men (and women) to myself.” When we express the fruit of the Spirit and lift Jesus up by the way we live, then he does that which he has promised to do.

### **Peter’s Sermon**

Verse 13. Seizing the opportunity, Peter began to explain to the people what had happened. This miracle was not the result of their doing, it had been done by God. “The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob” has done this thing to glorify his servant Jesus, whom you delivered

Verse 14. You denied him.

Verse 15. You killed him, but God raised him from the dead.

Verse 16. By faith in his name this man has been given perfect health, not just for his sake, but for *your* sake. Because,

Verse 17: You acted in ignorance as did your rulers.

Verse 18. If you look at your scripture, you will discover God foretold what has happened through prophets. This is a fulfillment of prophecy! You can’t claim ignorance any longer.

Verses 19. You must repent and totally change your way of thinking about Jesus, so “your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”

What a remarkable series of statements. What clear evidence the book of Acts does indeed record God’s second offer of the King and the Kingdom to the Jews. Christ had come once in the guise of a servant and they rejected him. He is presented a second time in his Kingly nature and they are asked to receive him. Why? Because--

Verse 25: They were sons and daughters of the prophets and of the covenant. They were a people whom God had blessed to be a blessing, and in tender, touching language Peter calls them to repentance and pleads with them to respond to the Savior.

Verse 26: “God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness.”

### **God, Him and you**

Three words in Peter’s invitation catch my attention: God, him and you. *God* is the giver. *Him*, that is Jesus, is the gift. *You*, the Jews, are the recipients. God the giver has presented Jesus, the Messiah, to you. Receive him. Obey him. Honor him as your King and you will be blessed.

As you know, the nation of Israel rejected Jesus a second time, and thus there is a second thread running through this book. First, the progressive rejection of Jesus by the Jews and the eclipse of Israel as God’s primary tool for working in the world. Second, the progressive acceptance of Jesus by the Gentiles and the emergence of the church as God’s primary tool for working in the world. So the message is for you, my Gentile brothers and sisters. God is still the giver. Jesus is still the gift. You are the intended recipient.

This message has been directed to believers, but if you slipped into this service and do not know the Savior, I invite you to take this opportunity to come into a personal, living relationship with Jesus. I invite you to experience the full gospel. To not only receive the gift of everlasting life in eternity to come, but to receive the gift of abundant life here and now, through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in you.

For those of us who know the Savior, the challenge remains to understand our mission. To be clear in our message. To be true in our method. To be joyous in our motivation and glorify Jesus by lifting him up through our life message so he may draw everyone to himself. In ways far more meaningful than silver and gold, the Lord is with us this morning in the bread and the cup. He is here to provide us power through the Spirit to deal creatively with the crippling nature of our circumstances.

I invite you, as a Christian believer, to use these moments of communion to renew your commitment to the things that matter most. To willfully, deliberately and continually place yourself under the domination and control of the Holy Spirit.

I declare to you one of the categorical imperatives of our faith: *Be filled with the Holy Spirit!*

## **The Church Established - Part 8**

Acts 4:1-22

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Key Truth: When God's People take God Seriously,  
the Reality of God's Power is Indisputable.

Attribute: God is . . .

### **The Connection**

There is a clear connection between chapters 3 and 4 of this remarkable book. Chapter 3 reports a miracle (Acts 3:1-10) that God used to give credibility to the growing ministry of the church. Chapter 3 also contains a message (Acts 3:11-26) Peter preached under the anointing of the Holy Spirit to interpret that miracle and present the message of the Gospel to the Jews a second time.

### **The Opposition**

Chapter 4 records the opposition of the religious establishment which was due more to the message than to the miracle. "And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the morrow, for it was already evening" (Acts 4:1-3). Verse 4 adds this interesting observation, "But many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of (them) came to about five thousand."

Even though Peter was not allowed to complete his sermon, hundreds of people responded to the Gospel. Whether the figure of 5,000 is in addition to the 3,000 converted on the day of Pentecost, or as some scholars suggest, an additional 2,000 may have been added to the original 3,000. What happened was a remarkable response to the presentation of the Gospel in spite of persecution!

We do not need to fear persecution. We need to fear indifference! One of the most devastating things being said about the Church is that it doesn't matter any more. It is irrelevant. It has lost its ability to impress people with its message. And if the enemies of the Church were smart they would realize oppression will galvanize the Church into action, while indifference will lull the Church to sleep.

### **The Interruption**

Right in the middle of Peter's sermon an interruption occurs. This is to be expected. The adversary cannot allow the people of God to be ignored, nor can he permit the Gospel to be heard without some static. We should not be surprised when, having been dealt a devastating body blow by the resurrection of Jesus, Satan would seek to silence the message of new life in Christ. What is interesting, and in a sense surprising, are the groups of people whom Satan used to achieve this.

### **The Priests**

First, there were the priests (Acts 4:1a). You would think the religious leaders would have been

excited about what was happening. They loved God and were committed to the things of God. But they were so busy defending God from his supposed detractors they lost touch with what God was doing in the world. So the priests were among those who joined the opposition.

### **The Captain**

Second, there was the captain of the temple (Acts 4:1b). He was the chief law enforcement officer of the high priest. It was his job to maintain law and order in the temple square, so it's obvious that should the high priest become concerned, his chief of staff would try to quell any disturbance. The interesting thing is that the disciples were not creating a disturbance! They were sharing the joy of this man whom God had healed.

The captain of the temple was like the head usher of a church about which I know. One day a new convert came into this staid, stolid, somewhat stuffy church and when the preacher began to preach, the new convert got so excited he said, "Amen." Nobody had ever heard "Amen" in *that* church before. They were shocked, but the preacher liked it and began to preach with more energy and fervor. As he got more passionate about what he was preaching there were more "Amens" and a couple of "Praise the Lords" and "Hallelujahs" from the new convert. Finally, the head usher tapped the fellow on the shoulder and motioned him to follow. When they got outside the head usher said, "Sir, you can't do that in this church." to which the new believer said, "But I've got religion." "Well, you didn't get it here and you're going to have to keep quiet." That was the attitude of the captain of the temple. Whatever the disciples were excited about they didn't get it in the temple and he had to silence this "disturbance."

### **The Sadducees**

Third, there were the Sadducees. This was an interesting group. They were Israel's aristocrats. They were affluent and influential. They were also liberal in their religious leanings. Many of them were priests who had forsaken the supernatural and rationalized the miraculous. The Sadducees did not believe in life after death. As far as the Sadducees were concerned, this life is all there is and there isn't any more. That's why they were sad-you-see!!!

The Sadducees did not want to hear this nonsense about life after death. Our text says, "They were annoyed because (the disciples) were proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:2). Why should that bug them? Well, if you believe this life is all there is, you become a secular materialist. Your preoccupation is to get whatever pleasures this life can produce *now*. Furthermore, secular materialists are good for business. They help the rich get richer!

Secular materialists are always buying and selling stuff in an effort to fill the emptiness inside. As long as the common folks were convinced this life is all there is, they would continue to support the Sadducees in their secular materialism. But, if they ever got hold of the reality of life after death it would be bad for business. They would become like Paul who was content with a little or a lot. Like Paul, they could own or not own. They could possess and not be possessed.

So the Sadducees had a lot on the line. Their values and their position as the top dogs in Israeli society was in jeopardy so they joined the priests and the captain of the temple in attempting to silence the good news of life after death.

### The Scene

Following a night in jail, Peter and John were brought before the supreme court of Israel. “On the morrow their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, ‘By what power or by what name did you do this?’” (Acts 4:5-7).

Let me set the scene for you. The Sanhedrin was the most powerful force in Israel. In the absence of a king, the high priest had become the center of political power. He was ex-officio president of the Sanhedrin comprised of representatives from various sections of the country. They were the rulers of the nation. The government. The Supreme Court of Israel. It was the Sanhedrin who just eight weeks before had condemned Jesus to certain death. So, central to the scene was this august body, seventy strong, decked out in the regalia and paraphernalia of their position.

Sitting in front of them were Peter and John, two unlettered, unlearned fishermen (Acts 4:13). Being “uneducated” does not mean they were illiterate. It means they were not part of the *Intelligencia*. They did not, in our parlance, have “a sheepskin” from the local university. They were not theological seminary graduates. As “common men” they were not part of the socially elite. They had no status or standing. They were not part of the country club set. They were common folks, just like us.

But, there was something unique, something distinctive about them, and “when (the Sanhedrin) saw the boldness of Peter and John . . . they were (amazed); and recognized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). I must resist the temptation to stop here because I cannot do justice to our text if I linger on these words, “they had been with Jesus.” But imagine what it must have been like to be with Jesus. To talk with him. To walk with him. To share with him. To eat with him. To get inside his skin and let him get inside your skin. Oh, to be with Jesus and have him be with us so his influence on us is obvious and people who see us know we had been with Jesus. Wow!

That is what was unique about Peter and John and that, more than anything else, is what terrorized the Sanhedrin. If it weren’t so serious, it would be hilarious. Here was THE power structure of the nation with life and death in their hands, facing two fishermen who had no status, no standing, no nothing! Indeed, God uses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to overcome the strong.

So that’s the situation. *A miracle* God used it to add credibility to the ministry of the growing church. *A message* Peter preached to interpret what had happened and to present the Gospel publicly to the Jewish people. *A trumped up charge* that they were disturbing the peace to get them jailed over night. *A trial* before the Supreme Court of Israel, the same group which eight weeks before had condemned Jesus to death. And *a question*: “By whose name have you done this?”

### The Trial

There are three things about this trial which are significant. First, the Sanhedrin did not deny the miracle! They couldn’t deny it, because “seeing the man that had been healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition” (Acts 4:14). They were faced with the reality of the

miracle. They could not deny it, and they did not.

Second, they did not deny the resurrection! That is even more amazing. As I have said many times from this pulpit: Christianity stands or falls on the resurrection. If Jesus is alive, everything is changed. If Jesus is not alive we are in the words of Paul: foolish preachers, people whose sin has not been removed and are just plain miserable (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Christianity stands or falls on the resurrection. If there had been one scintilla of evidence the resurrection was a hoax, the Sanhedrin would have presented it. If they could have created the slightest shadow of doubt that Jesus had risen from the dead, the Good News would have been turned into bad news and that would have been the end of it. But they did not because they could not. Deep in the soul of them they knew this incredible rumor was true and their silence shouts it. He lives. He lives. Christ Jesus lives today!

### **The Name**

Then they were concerned about the name in which this wonder had been done. “By what power or by what name did you do this?” (Acts 4:7). I’ve often talked about the meaning and significance of names to the Jews. A name was equivalent to the person bearing it. Disclosure of the name by which this miracle had been done would give the Sanhedrin a way of dealing with it.

If Peter and John said it had been done in the name of some demonic force, the Sanhedrin could sentence them to death and that would be that. Or, if they said it had been done in the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that would have been okay, too. The establishment could rest easy. Nothing miraculous had happened in the life of Israel for years, but if their God had done something they couldn’t understand, it would maintain the status quo. *But* if this miracle had been done in the name of *Jesus* that was a different story! That would mean Jesus was alive. That his power was resident in Peter and John. That God was doing a brand new thing in the world and *that* would put their status in jeopardy.

### **The Question**

So they asked a question: “Peter, John, by whose name have you done this?” I wonder how we would have responded if we had been in their sandals. Most of us would have to confess that under far less pressure and risk than that, we have chickened out. Most of us would have to admit that like candles in the sun we have wilted before the slightest hint of persecution.

### **The Filling**

I don’t know how we would have responded, but praise God for the way Peter responded (Acts 4:8). “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said . . .” Filled with the Holy Spirit? Wasn’t Peter filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost? Yes. Acts 2:4 says, “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” That included Peter. Why this additional reference to Peter being “filled with the Holy Spirit?”

Dear ones, listen! The meaning of that reference is so incredible, so indescribable, so fantastic in its practical implications for you and me I doubt that my vocabulary is sufficient to explain it. But this truth is so freeing to our ability to walk in the Spirit if we ever get hold of it we will never be the same. It’s so important I can’t deal with it today. I can only tell you I’m going to

discuss it thoroughly next Sunday when we look at Acts 4:23-31. But if you look at verse 31, which is part of next week's text, you'll see that when the friends of Peter and John had prayed, the place where they were gathered was shaken and they were all "filled" -- there's that word again -- "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:31-2).

Will it help if I unwrapped next week's text a bit and let you peek inside? Okay, let me give you a clue. It has something to do with the Greek language which is different from the English language. Our English Bible frequently uses the word "filled" usually with the same meaning. In the Greek New Testament the meaning of "filled" differs depending on the form in which the word appears. Will you come back next week if I give you another clue? Please say "yes." Okay, you're all coming back next week! *This* clue has to do with the difference between crisis, process and stasis. Being "filled with the Holy Spirit" is never a done deal! It is something which can, and must, occur again and again. If we hold of that reality and it gets hold of us, our understanding of what it means to be "filled with the Holy Spirit" will be altered forever and our joy in the Lord will be increased.

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, by what means this man has been healed, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel (now here's the test of their integrity, what will they say?) that *by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth*, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by *him* this man is standing before you well. This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name given among men by which we must be saved."(Acts 4:8-12).

The crisis facing Peter was that of presenting the Gospel to the nation of Israel through her *leaders*. Jesus had given specific instruction that the Good News of the resurrection was to be presented *first* in *Jerusalem* (Acts 1:8). The first time Jesus was presented to the nation of Israel it was as a suffering servant. The *leaders* of Israel were not able to identify with that kind of Messiah so they rejected him. Now Jesus is being presented a second time, not as a suffering servant, but as a risen Lord. The leaders of Israel are given a second chance to receive their King and his kingdom.

The offer had been made *strategically* on Pentecost. The Bible says there were "devout men there from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5) so it was strategically possible, through that one presentation of the Gospel, to make the Good News known to Jews *throughout the world*. The Gospel was presented *publicly* in Peter's second sermon (Acts 3:12-26). *Common folk* received the news and at least 2,000 believed it (Acts 4:4).

Now it is being presented *officially* to the Supreme Court of Israel. We can only imagine what would have happened if the *leaders* of Israel had responded positively to the Messiah that day. If they had completely changed their way of thinking about Jesus. If they had accepted him whom they had previously rejected. But they did not accept him. They rejected him a second time.

### **The Stone**

That this was special a presentation to Israel is made clear in verse 11. Peter says, "This is the



stone which was rejected by you builders.” The Sanhedrin knew instantly what Peter was talking about. According to an ancient Jewish legend, the stones used to build Solomon’s temple were cut, polished and prepared in a quarry from which they were transported to Mount Zion where they were fitted into place. All of these stones were roughly the same size and shape except for one stone which was different from the rest. Because it was in their way, some workmen rolled it over a cliff and it landed in the Kidron Valley below Mount Zion.

Seven years later( that’s how long it took to build Solomon’s temple) the builders needed the capstone but it was nowhere to be found. A message was sent to the quarry, “Where is the capstone?” “We sent it to you a long time ago.” But it was not there. Finally an elderly workman remembered there had been an oddly shaped stone which the builders rolled over the cliff to get it out of the way. A team of workers went down to the Kidron Valley, and according to the legend, after rummaging around, they found it covered by weeds. It showed signs of seven years of neglect. They cleaned it off, brought it up to Mt. Zion, put it in place and it fit perfectly. It was the capstone of Solomon’s temple.

### **The Punch Line**

When Peter told the Sanhedrin, “(Jesus) is the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner” (4:11), they knew exactly what he meant. He was saying: your Messiah came, but in your mind he wasn’t shaped like a Messiah. He didn’t talk like a Messiah. He didn’t act like a Messiah. He didn’t walk like a Messiah. So you rejected him and demanded his crucifixion. It’s as if you dumped him in the Kidron Valley. But God raised him up, dusted him off and is presenting him to you a second time. Please don’t reject him again, “for there is salvation in no one else” (4:12).

If I were to give you an alternate key truth this morning it would be this: *It is possible to be convinced and not converted.* The Sanhedrin were convinced. The evidence was overwhelming. A man had been healed. It had been done in the matchless name of Jesus. Through his resurrection he was alive and empowered by the Holy Spirit. He was ministering through Peter and John. It was clear that they had been with Jesus! The power, authority and grace with which they spoke was overwhelming.

Yes, the Sanhedrin were convinced, but they were not converted. The price was too high. It would mean setting aside their traditions and their structures. It would mean giving up their status and security. It would mean becoming involved in this new thing God was doing in the world, and the price was just too high. So they rejected him a second time.

Some of you are doing the same thing today. You are convinced about Jesus. The evidence is overwhelming. No one in all of history has been so scrutinized as he. Jesus has been subjected to the searchlight of the centuries, and no one has found fault in him. But while convinced, you are not converted. The price is too high and you are unwilling to pay it.

### **The Price**

Some of you are convinced, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, there is a lifestyle which is gracious and winsome and victorious and abundant. When I invited you to symbolically put yourself under the domination of the Holy Spirit by coming forward and kneeling, many of you were convinced and hundreds responded. Maybe you were one of them. Maybe you were not!

Maybe you are one who, though convinced, there has to be something more to the Christian life than you've experienced, so you remain unconverted to life in the Spirit and living under his control

Well, the nation of Israel rejected Jesus a second time and their rejection marked the end of Israel being the vehicle through which God does his work in the world. The Church was given that task and what some call "the day of the Gentiles" began. A few decades ago, the nation of Israel was reborn as a national force, and if we read the signs of the times correctly, "the day of the Gentiles" is coming to an end. God is about to close the curtain on the final act of the play when Jesus will be presented to Israel as their Messiah, not as a suffering servant, but as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and those whose eyes have been blinded by false teaching will have one last chance to make him their own

### **The Choice**

In the meantime, we who are the body of Christ also have a choice to make. It is a continuing choice to be made in every situation we face. It is the choice Peter and John faced 2000 years ago: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to (people) rather than to God . . ." (Acts 4:19). Go back to verse 18, "They (the Sanhedrin) called them (Peter and John) and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.' And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people; for all men praised God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old."

You and I have a choice to make: Obey people or obey God. In a day of mounting oppression when one by one our religious freedoms are being taken away -- in a day when the establishment around the world is more and more anti-Christ -- you and I have a choice to make. Obey people or obey God. God grant that like Peter and John we shall be "filled with the Holy Spirit" and choose to obey him. May we with boldness and grace ( because the Holy Spirit is a gentleman and he will make us gentle-men and gentle-women ) bear witness to what we have seen and heard and know of the amazing grace and matchless power of God poured out upon us. And may we do it in a way which will let people know we have been with Jesus. For, as our key truth says: *When God's people take God seriously, the reality of God's power is indisputable.*

## The Church Established – Part 9

Acts 4:23-31

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Key truth: Opposition provides opportunities for Spirit-filled people to grow.

Attribute: God is a Gentleman

The world as it is, is not the world as it was meant to be! When God spoke this marvelous planet into existence by the word of his power, everything was in harmony with everything else (Genesis 1:1 - 2:25). However, sin entered the scene, and for a season, disrupted God's intention (Genesis 3:1 - 24). But God took the initiative to restore what sin had destroyed (Genesis 12:1-3). He chose a man named Abram and through him brought into being a nation called Israel which became the womb out of which a Messiah would be born. Thus God's plan for his creation became clear: while the world as it is, is not the world as it was meant to be, what was meant to be in the beginning *will* be in the end!

Galatians 4:4 describes how, when conditions were exactly right, "God sent his Son, born of woman, born under the law to redeem those who were under the law." The four Gospels detail Christ's earthly ministry. They tell us what he said and how he said it. What he did and why he did it. They also make it clear that this *first* presentation of their Messiah to Israel did not impress them. Jesus came in the guise of a suffering servant and didn't look like a Messiah. He didn't talk like a Messiah. He didn't act like a Messiah. So they rejected him.

In fact, the Israelites pressed for his crucifixion and succeeded. Jesus was put to death. But God raised him up and Acts 4:1-22 provides historical evidence of a *second* presentation of their Messiah to the people of Israel, this time through their leaders. But Jesus is rejected a second time. "When they (the Supreme Court of Israel) had commanded them (Peter and John) to go aside out of the council, they conferred with one another saying, 'what shall we do with these men? A notable sign has been performed through them and is known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and *we cannot deny it*. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any one in this name'" (Acts 4:15-17).

Thus we come to a critical change in Israel's place in the plan of God. The book of Acts contains dual themes which move concurrently from beginning to end. One, because of its *persistent rejection* of Jesus, is the eclipse of Israel as the primary agency through which God does his work in the world. The other, because of its *progressive acceptance* of Jesus, is the emergence of the church as the vehicle through which God will do his work in the world.

Chapter 4 records this critical turning points. The gospel of the King and his Kingdom is presented to Israel officially through their leaders, who officially reject him. Ever so swiftly the nation of Israel goes into eclipse as the primary agency through which God does his work in the world, and gradually the church emerges as that tool.

Following this official rejection of Jesus by the Sanhedrin, Peter and John are brought into the room and are told they are not "to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:17). Their reply is historic! "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than God, you must judge; for we cannot help but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19,20). "And

when they (the Sanhedrin) had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people; for all men praised God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old” (Acts 4:21-22).

Our text picks up the narrative at verse 23: “When they were released they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.” I want to pause here, for we are about to walk on Holy Ground. Holy Ground is any ground where God and his people meet, and we are about to step on to Holy Ground as we observe what happened next.

### **The Humanity of Peter and John**

Notice the humanity of Peter and John. After standing alone before the same people who eight weeks earlier had condemned Jesus to death and then boldly witnessing in the name of Jesus, when they were released, the first thing John and Peter did was to get back in touch with their brothers and sisters in Christ. They “went to church!”

### **They Needed Reassurance**

That’s helpful to me. It means even Spirit-filled people need each other. As a matter of fact, the essence of a Spirit-filled walk is community. So the first thing Peter and John did was reconnect with their fellow believers. They needed affirmation. They needed reassurance. They needed encouragement. To put it in contemporary terms, they needed some strokes! They needed to know they were part of Something bigger than themselves.

As they shared what they had said and done, I’m sure someone in the gathered Body of Christ said, “Praise the Lord, Peter! Praise the Lord, John! What happened was a fulfillment of what the Lord said would happen. Remember when we were with him before he ascended into heaven? He said, there will come a time when you’ll be tested. When you will be called upon to speak for me. When that happens don’t worry about what to say. The Holy Spirit will instruct you. And that’s exactly what happened, fellows! The Holy Spirit told you what to say and you said it with clarity and integrity. It doesn’t get any better than that, guys! You preached the Good News to the leaders of our nation!

And Peter and John *were* reassured. They experienced “church” the way I believe “church” is supposed to be. “Church” is not where life is lived. Life is lived out on the frontier. Out where it’s necessary to push back the perimeters of God’s activity in the world. But out on the frontier where the battle is waged, there’s risk and danger and exhaustion. There’s the depletion of human resources. That’s where the church comes in! The church is God’s stockade on the frontier where life is lived. It’s the place we need to come back to. The place where our spirits will be replenished. Our souls refreshed. Our wounds healed. The place where supported by a small group of loving, caring, nurturing people we are made whole again.

We rarely really cope with life successfully when we function as members of a mass. Belonging to a church “en masse” is important. It’s good to have great gatherings like this to inspire us and remind us we are part of Something BIG. But more important are the small groups. The little clusters of believers. The intimate fellowships which affirm us, feed us, support us and encourage us to return to the frontier and stand tall again.

### **They Needed to Share Good News**

Peter and John needed that. They also needed a chance to share what had been going on in their

lives. They were excited. God had done something fantastic and I can hear John and Peter saying, “Fellows, it was Genesis 50:20 all over again! Remember when Joseph was rejected by his brothers? He landed in Egypt and in an amazing way wound up in a place of incredible influence. Later he was in a position to ‘pay back’ the brothers who had sold him into slavery (Genesis 30:28). But God used evil for good and Joseph was used to keep the fledgling family of God intact. When their father Jacob died, the brothers wondered if now that dad was gone, Joseph would put the leather to them. Instead, Joseph said, ‘You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good’ (Genesis 50:20).

“And, guys, that’s exactly what happened today. The priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees meant it for evil, but God meant it for good! They got us arrested so they could silence us. But as a consequence of our arrest we had an opportunity to present the gospel officially to the Supreme Court of our country. The most powerful, influential people in all of Israel heard the gospel – *officially*. It’s Genesis 50:20 all over again!”

Peter and John needed fellowship and refreshing. So when they were freed they immediately got together with their brothers and sisters in Christ. They needed to share their enthusiasm and excitement about what God was doing out on the frontier.

### **They Needed to Experience Praise of God’s People.**

Spontaneously, with one voice, the church turned to prayer and praise. Look at our key truth for today: *Opposition provides opportunities for Spirit-filled people to grow*. Someone has said, “Our one remaining freedom is the freedom to choose how we respond to the various situations in which we find ourselves.” The early church could have chosen to turn tail and run. To head for cover. To hide. To protect their own skin. They could have formed a committee and tried to figure out various human solutions to their problems. Instead, they used the opportunity to grow and their first reaction was to praise the Lord.

I wish that were true of us. I wish our *habitual* response to tough situations would be to praise the Lord. I wish our immediate, automatic response would be to pray the *moment* we’re in need. Often prayer and praise are the *last* thing we do. I’m reminded of a doctor, who preparing a patient for surgery said, “I’ll be praying for you.” In a panic the patient exclaimed, “Has it come to that!” Prayer and praise are often the last resort for many of us, not the first. But spontaneously those first-century, born again, Spirit-filled, growing Christians went to prayer.

### **The Nature of Their Prayer.**

And notice, please, the nature of their prayer. It begins with pure praise. “Sovereign Lord, who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them...” (Acts 4:24b). Think about that with me. What did the Sadducees believe in? That’s right: what they could see, what they could feel and what they could touch. They believed in the so-called “real” things. But as the church gathered together to pray, they go beyond the creation to the Creator! In essence they said, “*You made* the stuff the Sadducees put their trust in, Lord. And it is *You* whom we trust, not what You made. *You made* the heavens as a source of refreshment by day and glory by night. *You made* the earth.” “*You are* the creator of it all.”

Worship is telling God what we like about him. What we admire in him. When we do that we are reminded Who it is we are talking to when we pray. We are made aware of what he can be

to us and the early church knew that. “*You* are sovereign, Lord. We move beyond the creation in which our adversaries trust, to *You* the Creator.” They praised him who is almighty.

### **The Lord’s Response to Praise**

As they were praying, the Lord responded by bringing to mind a passage of scripture. I’m sure it was familiar to them, even God cannot bring to our remembrance what we don’t know, but it came to them in a fresh way with fresh meaning for them. “Who by the mouth of our father David, thy servant, didst say by the Holy Spirit, ‘Why did the gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves in array, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Anointed’ for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy Holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place” (Acts 4:25-27).

As they were praying, the Lord led their minds to this familiar passage of scripture from Psalm 2. They remembered David’s reference to the gentiles, to the kings of the earth and to the rulers. Seeing the relevance of that to their situation, it suddenly came together for them. They not only knew what the psalm said and what the psalm meant, *they knew what the psalm meant to them!*

That’s when bible study gets exciting . When we not only know what it says and what it means, but we also know what it means to *us!* That’s when it becomes relevant. That’s when it becomes useful and applicable to our situation.

### **The Lord Instructs Them**

As the church is in prayer, the Lord instructs them. He lets them know he is involved in their situation. The same God who made heaven and earth and the sea *and everything in them* is working on their behalf. As they reflect on the fact that David had made this prophecy hundreds of years before, it suddenly dawned on them: *God was using this situation to fulfill what he had ordained!*

Beloved, listen to me: there may be *incidents* in a Christian’s life, but there are no *accidents* in a Christian’s life! God is not only *above* everything, he is *in* everything. Predestination is not God dangling you and me from the strings of fate which he pulls and we respond, puppet-like, to his commands. Predestination is God’s foreknowledge in action.

The Bible makes it clear that before God made human beings, he knew a savior would be needed. That’s why a lamb was slain before the foundation of the earth to cover the sins of people who had not yet been born! God also knew that when that lamb, the Lord Jesus, was presented to the world he would be rejected and be crucified. So God prepared the resurrection! God knew the events reported in our text would take place, so he took the circumstances sinful people gave him and used them for his purpose. He made all things work together for good so what was meant to be in the beginning will be in the end!

All of a sudden Peter and John and the people “get it.” God was at work using those difficult and confusing experiences to do what he had set out to do in the beginning: *bring redemption to*

*the world!* Excuse me, but hallelujah!

### **The Authenticity of Their Petition**

“And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy Holy servant Jesus” (4:29, 30).

I’m glad the Holy Spirit led Luke to put it down in that order. First, they laid before the Lord their praise. Then, and only then, after reminding themselves Who it was they were talking to, they lay their personal needs before the Lord.

If we’re honest with ourselves, we’d all like to be *so* filled with the Holy Spirit we’re thinking about others all the time. Thinking about the name of the Lord and of his reputation. But folks there are times when I think about *me* first. Does that shock you? Does that ever happen to you? Are there times when the pressures of life and the oppression of the adversary are so great you become preoccupied with your situation? Yes, we all do.

But to their credit, it was only after praising him, after hallowing his name so to speak, that these oh so young Christians presented their need to him. And when they finally got around to doing so, they didn’t ask that the threat be removed! They didn’t ask God to knock the opposition out of the box. They prayed for grace to speak with boldness! They knew what the temptation was. They knew where their point of vulnerability was. It was to keep quiet. To *not* speak. To *not* minister in Jesus\* name because it was dangerous. So mindful of the danger they prayed, “Help us speak thy word with all boldness” (Acts 4:29).

Let me pause here, because I want to insert a word of caution. Sometimes we preachers say things forcefully in an effort to capture your attention and hold it, but we don’t take time to explain what we mean. So let me make myself clear. You may decide it’s God\*s will for you to speak with boldness. So you go back to your job tomorrow and start passing out tracts and sticking scripture verses on the bulletin board. What *you* think is boldness is viewed by some as rudeness. Well, one of the symbols for the Holy Spirit is a dove (Matthew 3:16). A dove is gentle. A dove does not rush at people. Another symbol of the Holy Spirit is wind. You feel its presence, you know it\*s there, but you can’t see it. You can only see what it does. The wind witnesses to its reality by just being there. And if you seek wisdom, as James 1:5 invites you to, the Holy Spirit will show you how to be bold in ways which are consistent with who you are. Our attribute for today declares: *God is a gentleman*. And if you ask him, the Holy Spirit will help you act and speak in ways which win and woo.

### **The Efficacy of Their Prayers**

As a consequence of their praise and petitions we’re told: “when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).

This brings us to one of the most exciting, liberating and growth inspiring aspects of the Holy Spirit\*s ministry to believers. If you can “get it” and it can get you, this truth will change you and your walk in the Spirit for the rest of your life. It is so profound I question whether or not the limitations of my vocabulary can do it justice, but let me try. I want to hang this teaching on

three words: Crisis, Process and Stasis.

### **Crisis**

There are three tenses in the Greek language which the New Testament uses to explain the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers today. The first, the **ao­rist tense** (pronounced a-or-ist) denotes a sudden, definite act. It has no counterpart in English. The aorist tense is best described as a dot. Put simply, it describes a crisis rather than a process.

One occasion when that tense was used was Pentecost when “they (the disciples) were all *filled* (**ao­rist tense**) with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4). Another incident is found in Acts 4:8 where Peter, who was in the upper room on Pentecost is “*filled* (**ao­rist tense**) with the Holy Spirit” a second time. However, in this case the original language not only describes the filling which occurs to help Peter meet a crisis, it also describes the affect of that filling on Peter.

He experienced what we have been calling a “fill-bap.” He was *filled* (**ao­rist tense**) with the Holy Spirit, and at the same time he was *baptized* by the Holy Spirit so he was outwardly and objectively recognized to be a follower of Jesus. “They (the Sanhedrin) recognized that (he) had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).

Today’s text records a third use of the aorist tense. When the Christians were forbidden to preach or teach in the name of Jesus they rebelled. They prayed for power to face that crisis and “. . . when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all *filled* (**ao­rist tense**) with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness” ( Acts 4:31).

Paul was *filled* (**ao­rist tense**) with the Holy Spirit at the time of his conversion ( Acts 9:17). Later, when he was severely tested by the sorcerer, Elymas, Paul was *filled* again (Acts 13:9). “But Saul, who is also called Paul, (was) *filled* (**ao­rist tense**) with the Holy Spirit . . .” ( Acts 9:17).

The “so what?” element in this for you is that in moments of crisis, times of temptation and periods of testing, you may, in fact, you must, ask to be *filled* (**ao­rist tense**) by the Holy Spirit to meet that crisis. When you do, the good Lord who said, “Ask and you shall receive” (Matthew 7:7) provides exactly what you need exactly when you need it.

### **Process**

The second tense in Greek which refers to the work of the Holy Spirit, is the **imperfect tense**. Instead of a dot which describes the **ao­rist tense**, the **imperfect tense** is best illustrated by a series of dots or a dotted line. It is linear and refers to continuous action: a process instead of a crisis.

Acts 13:9, 52 provide an excellent illustration of the differences in these two Greek tenses. In Acts 13:9 Saul, who is called Paul, is “*filled* (**ao­rist tense**) with the Holy Spirit.” In Acts 13:52 “the disciples were *filled* (**imperfect tense**) with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

Verse 9 pinpoints a moment of need. Elymas, the magician, is contesting with Paul and Paul puts his situation and himself under the domination of the Holy Spirit and is *filled* (**ao­rist tense**)



with the Holy Spirit for that crisis.

In verse 52 the **imperfect tense** is used to describe a continuing action. The disciples are *being filled (imperfect tense)* with joy and with the Holy Spirit. It is not a crisis, it is a process. It is not a dot, it is a dotted line.

### **Stasis**

The third tense used to describe the ministry of the Holy Spirit is the **present tense** and does not refer to crisis or process, but defines stasis: the state or condition growing out of numerous crises and processes which produce a Spirit-filled *lifestyle*.

Here are a few texts which use the **present tense**: “Barnabas is a good man *full (present tense)* of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 11:24). Stephen was a man “*full (present tense)* of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5 ; 7:55). When deacons were needed by the early church they picked seven men “of good repute, *full (present tense)* of the Spirit”(Acts 6:3).

These people did not have spasmodic experiences in the Holy Spirit. They had habitual experiences in the Holy Spirit. They were *full (present tense)* of the Holy Spirit and in my judgement they were normal. They were as we ought to be. Not running from crisis to crisis. Not just committed to a process. We should be *practicing* the process to the point of habitually being under the direction of the Holy Spirit so the Spirit’s fruit is *routinely* seen in us.

Obedience is the Big Word in a Spirit-filled life. Not as a “dead works” thing (Hebrews 6:1) as if, by being obedient, you will earn additional spiritual “brownie points.” Rather, obedience is the *preferred response* of grateful sinners to God’s amazing grace (Romans 5:20b-6:23). That’s what being *full (present tense)* of the Spirit meant for Barnabas and the others. They came to a place where *routine* obedience resulted in their being *full (present tense)* of the Spirit.

Theirs was not a crisis, nor was it a process. Their’s was *stasis*: a *condition* which grew out of numerous crises and processes resulting in a Spirit-filled lifestyle. A life *full (present tense)* of the Spirit is a normal Christian life. Not average, but *normal*, in which the word *full* is not a verb describing an action, but an adjective describing a condition.

### **Look Where the Imperfect Tense Is Located**

Which brings us to the bottom line! Look where the imperfect tense is located: between the (**aorist**) *crisis* or initial filling, and the (**perfect**) ideal or *stasis* of fullness, is the (**imperfect**) *process of being* filled. And *being* filled (**imperfect tense**) with the Holy Spirit is not complicated. It is nothing more than a conscious, deliberate decision to go on *being* filled (**imperfect tense**) with the Spirit again and again and again. If you drain your cup of blessing-to-be-a-blessing, pause to be refilled. As you expend, take time to expand. As you give of yourself, open yourself to receive. When you sin, repent and seek forgiveness. You’ll soon discover fresh infillings of the Spirit are available when you need them.

### **Give Yourself Permission to Be Imperfect!**

Learning to live in the **imperfect tense** prepares you to experience the **present tense** and be *full* of the Spirit. Let me repeat that: Learning to live in the **imperfect tense** prepares you to experience the **present tense** and be *full* of the Spirit. So give yourself permission to be

imperfect! Life is a process. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that living a Spirit-filled life is also a process.

Giving yourself permission to be imperfect, to be in *process*, protects you from the snare of unrealistic expectations. You free the loving Father to set the agenda remembering: “*God* is at work in you, both to will and to work for *his* good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). And “He who *began* a good work in you will bring it to *completion*” (Philippians 1:6). That’s what you really want, isn’t it!

## **The Church Established - Part 10**

Acts 4:32-5:16

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Key Truth: When we view our stuff as being God's stuff he has the stuff to \_\_\_\_\_.  
But when we view God's stuff as being our stuff -- look out!

Attribute: God is Entruster

Have you ever wondered what it would have *felt* like to be part of the New Testament church? Our study of Acts 2: 41-47 gave a glimpse of the organizational structure and we examined its living purpose. Not just its purpose for living, but its dynamic, growth producing ministry of instruction, fellowship, worship and expression aimed at winning the lost and helping them become like Jesus. Today's text gives us an intimate look at the *internal* or *feeling* life that ever so young Body of Christ moving away from concern about *what* they were doing to *how* they were doing it. What we see is the church as a community of unity, purity and power.

### **Unity**

There is an unfortunate division in the English translation between chapters four and five. Chapter five should begin with verse 31 of chapter 4. These are two parts of one piece. They fit together. And they make it clear that the most salient characteristic of the New Testament was unity.

There was incredible diversity in the early church. Some of its members were native Palestinians, some came from other countries and places in that part of the world, and because of their differences in background, heredity and environment, they had different ways of doing things. Different traditions. Different social patterns. Different mores. These were things which *could* have divided them, but instead they were united in the Spirit. "The company of those who believed were of one heart and one soul" (4:32a).

### **Practical Expressions of Their Unity**

The balance of chapter 4 describes the practical expressions of their unity. "They had everything in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need" (4:32b-35).

What's described here has no relationship to Atheistic Communism which says, "What's yours is ours, we'll take it." The New Testament church said, "What's mine is ours, let's share it." The principle of private property and the right to distribute one's possessions is clearly established. Later we will hear Peter saying, "Ananias while it remained unsold, it did not remain your own? And after it was sold, did it not remain at your disposal?" (4:5). The right to private property and the right of the owners to distribute that property as he or she sees fit is not in question. Nor is what is described here a single event, sort of a huge garage sale in which everybody sold what

they had and put it all into a common pot. What's described here are routine actions regularly carried out.

This is made clear in what I think is the finest of the current translations, the New International Version which puts it this way, "There were no needy persons among them, for from time to time, those who owned land or houses sold them and brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles feet. It was distributed to anyone as he had needs." This was not one big sale, but occasional sales voluntarily held as needed to help those who were paying a heavy price for their commitment to Jesus.

In practice the New Testament church was a Christian Life Center! It was designed and committed to meeting the legitimate needs of believers. Their physical needs to keep the Lord's temple properly maintained, and their social, intellectual, emotional, volitional and spiritual needs as they learned to make decisions characteristic of Christ.

The concept of a Christian Life Center is not new, you see. It goes back to the early days of the church and what we see in our text is what the church was *meant* to be! God has given us a desire to recreate that kind of atmosphere here in Bakersfield.. And while we are busy *building* a Christian Life Center which will serve as the headquarters of the many ministries of First Baptist Church, my prayer is that this church will *be* a Christian Life Center! That we will *be* a people committed to the task of meeting the legitimate needs of believers. That we will not just *have* a Christian Life Center, we will *be* one! All to the goal of winning the lost and discipling them.

If that is going to happen we must open our eyes and be sensitized to what those need are. We must begin to see people as they really are. Let me show you what I mean. One of my good friends is Erik. Erik comes up to my knees and is a delightful little boy. He and I have become great friends. A couple of Sundays ago I was going to my car following the services. I was tired physically and emotionally spent. I just wanted to be alone and reflect on what God had done in our midst which was awesome! I was lost in my thoughts when I heard a voice say, "Hey!" I looked around and didn't see anybody. Then I felt a tug on my trousers and I heard a louder "Hey!" I looked down and there was Erik. I said, "Hi, Erik, I didn't see you." He stuck out his lower lip and said, "I know." He didn't want to be overlooked. He didn't want to be missed. He wanted to be part of the action.

Often we overlook the so called "little people." Not just "little" in their physique like Erik, but in their quietness, their unintrusiveness, their lack of assertiveness, their desire not to be a problem. We overlook them and they get lost in the woodwork. That's sad. More than that, it's sinful! And it happens because we are more concerned with what they can do for *us* than what we can do for *them*.

We're like the little boy who went to his buddy's house, knocked on the door and asked, "Can Timmy come out and play?" "No," replied Timmy's mom, "He's taking his nap." To which the little kid replied, "Well, can Timmy's new scooter come out and play?" Isn't that like us? Isn't that the way it often is? We are people users concerned about what they can do for us rather than what we can do for them.

Acts 4:32-37 comes into sharp focus in the key truth we drew from these verses. "*When we view*

*our stuff as being God's stuff, he has the stuff to . . .*" We left the options open because when we view our stuff as God's stuff, he has the stuff to do whatever he wants to do." He has the stuff to meet the needs of the whole body, *and* get this, he has the stuff he needs to help us be all we can be.

One of the exciting things that happens when we realize our stuff is really God's stuff is that *we, ourselves*, become part of the stuff he uses. Someone said, "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day." And when you analyze what precedes and follows verse 33 it's clear these people were *living* the sermons the apostles were preaching. They were living evidence of the practicality of the principles being taught.

You'll never know how much confidence it gives me to stand before you today and say: I know that out on Olive Drive God is going to build a great Christian Life Center, and to his glory is going to enable us to build it without going into debt, because hundreds of you have already committed yourself to achieving that goal. And can't you imagine what it meant to Peter and John and the other apostles as they stood up to preach to have standing behind them hundreds of living examples of the principles they were teaching!

Our text gives us two demonstrations of these principles in action. One in the form of a commendation and the other in the form of a condemnation.

### **The Commendation**

In Acts 4:36, 37 we are told about Joseph, the Cypriot. We are not told how he became a follower of Jesus. Maybe he came from Cyprus to participate in the Passover festival, heard the gospel and was one of the 3,000 who made a decision for Christ that day. We don't know *how* he became a member of the body, we only know he did. And out of love for Jesus, Joseph sold his property and donated the proceeds to the apostles to help meet the many needs of the young church.

### **Not Impulse Giving**

What he did is not an illustration of impulsive giving. Joseph was a Levite and historically Levites could not own property. Though that law had been relaxed, the disposition of his property, probably on Cyprus, a distant island, involved a lot of paper work and legal entanglements. So a lot of thought and prayer went into his decision. It was not an impulsive act. It was a well thought out, deliberate decision and expressed his concern for his brothers and sisters in Christ. It also expressed his deep trust in his leaders. There were no strings attached to his gift. He didn't ask for an explanation of how it was going to be used, he just gave it. It also shows Joseph's faith in the power of God to meet his *future* needs. He shows no anxiety about what will happen to him in the *future* now that he has given away what he had.

There were no Biblical rules or regulation requiring that he do that. He did it as a spontaneous expression of his love of Jesus. Later we are told Joseph was a man full of the Holy Spirit. It was characteristic of his lifestyle to live under the direction and control of the Holy Spirit and the apostles were so blessed by how Joseph lived they gave him a new name: *Barnabas!* which means "son of encouragement and comfort." He was so filled with the Holy Spirit, so much like Jesus, they honored him by giving him one of the names of the Holy Spirit: the comforter!

### **The Condemnation**

They meant that for good, but Satan who never leaves the body of Christ alone, immediately used it for evil. Chapter 5 describes how jealousy caused two members of the church to do a terrible thing. Acts 5:1 begins with the word “*but*” which tells us a sharp contrast is about to follow. “*But* a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property, and with his wife’s knowledge he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles feet. But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie of the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? How is that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man, but to God.’ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear came upon all who heard it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him” (Acts 5:1-6)

About three hours later his wife came in. I don’t know where she’d been. Maybe she went to the mall to spend some of the money they held back. Or maybe she had been waiting for the “strategic moment” to make a grand entrance and have the church give her a standing ovation for her and her husbands generosity. I don’t know. It just says three hours later she came in not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, ‘Tell me, whether you sold the land for so much’ (indicating the amount Ananias had given) and she said, ‘Yes, for so much.’ But Peter said to her, ‘How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Hark, the feet of those that have buried your husband are at the door? And they will carry you out?’ Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things” (Acts 4:7-11).

What was their sin? When you put all the evidence together it is clearly the breaking of one of the Ten Commandments: “Thou shalt not covet.” A lot of attention and adulation had been given to Joseph. Apparently he knew how to handle it. He was full of the Holy Spirit and it went in one ear and out the other. But Ananias and Sapphira coveted that kind of adulation and covetousness caused them to do several things.

### **They Were Guilty of Faithlessness.**

When they realized how much money they made on the deal I can almost hear Ananias saying “Sapphira, do you realize how much money this is? We can’t afford to give this much to the church.” And they both entered into a conspiracy to do what they did.

### **They Were Guilty of Pretense.**

They misrepresented the part as being the whole. Faithlessness and Pretense. Two deadly sins. And folks, that comes awfully close to home. I have lost count of those who give as their excuse for not paying God’s tithes, “You don’t know what my other responsibilities are. You don’t know how I give here and there. You don’t know how I support all of these various agencies.” The appearance, the pretense, the misrepresentation is that they *are* tithing and it’s unfair to ask them to give more. A couple of months ago I had enough love for someone to ask that person to be explicit. When we sat down with pen and paper it turned out his total giving represented less than three percent of his income.

Ananias told a covert lie and Sapphira told an overt lie. She boldly said, “Yes, we sold it for so

much” (5:8) when in fact, they didn’t! It appears they wanted people to pat them on the back. They forgot their stuff is God’s stuff and they misused it. Actually folks, *we* don’t have any stuff. It’s all God’s stuff. We’re just stewards who, by his grace, are privileged to temporarily *use* his stuff.

When I was about seven, I had a girlfriend. Her name was Gloria. She was the prettiest thing on the block, and had me wrapped around her little finger. Gloria would say, “Johnnie!” and I’d come running. In my eyes she was the best thing since popcorn. Well, she figured out a way for us to get some money to buy candy, and we conspired together to play a game we called “Real Estate.” We got some old sticks from a house which had been torn down, stuck them in my dad’s front yard about three feet apart, tied string around them forming individual plots. Then we sold these plots of land to our friends for a few pennies each. We were making money hand over fist until my dad came home. After warming the seat of my britches and making us give the money back, he explained that we didn’t have the right to sell that land because it wasn’t ours. It belonged to him. By his grace we were allowed to play on it and enjoy it, but we were not allowed to sell it.

A lot of us are playing “real estate” with God’s stuff. That’s what Ananias and Sapphira did. Satan tempted them and they fell. You see, it is possible to be filled with, or controlled by, the Holy Spirit and it is possible to be filled with or controlled by Satan. And whether it was fear of their own future, or fear of not being accepted, or whatever, Satan tempted Ananias and Sapphira, they succumbed and paid a terrible price for their sin.

The second half of our key truth for today says, *When we view God’s stuff as being our stuff, lookout!* This leads me to the second characteristic of the internal life of the New Testament church:

### **Purity**

It was not only characterized by unity, but also purity. Notice the swiftness with which judgement came. Better yet, go back to Genesis 3. Humanity was in its infancy. Adam and Eve sinned. Instantaneously they were put out of the garden of Eden and cherubim were there with flaming swords to guard the way to the Tree of Life lest they eat of that tree and live forever in their sinfulness without hope of ever being redeemed. In humanities infancy God acted swiftly and decisively.

In Joshua 7 we’re told that when the nation of Israel was in its infancy, having been purged by forty years of wandering in the wilderness, Achan sinned and was instantly cut off. God couldn’t tolerate any kind of sinful infection in the young nation. *And* when the church was in its infancy God could not and did not permit the sins of Ananias and Sapphira to become the lifestyle of others, so judgment came swiftly

The New Testament church was not just another institution. It was not just another gathering. It was not just another service club. It was the body of Christ on earth. It was a believing body. It was a unified body. It was a growing, loving, healing, ministering body. But more than that, it was a purified body controlled by the Holy Spirit who is first, last and always: Holy. The purity of that new born body of believers was so intense the *instant* a speck of the flesh appeared it was excised!

Peter didn't cause Ananias and Sapphira to die. God didn't cause them to die. *They* caused their *own* death. They tried to live by the principles of the flesh in an atmosphere charged with the purity of Holy Spirit and suffered the consequences.

The flesh and the Spirit can not co-exist! Does that terrify you this morning? Well let me assure you what happened to Ananias and Sapphira is not likely to happen here. Somebody asked me what kind of a response I have planned for this morning, and in a half serious way, I said, "I hope we have enough young men to carry off the folks who die." I was joking, of course, but if this principle were applied to our congregation this morning how many of us would walk out this room? Is it possible we are able to tolerate bad stewardship because the level of purity is so low a little more impurity isn't noticeable? Is it possible the light of Christ in our midst is so dim we are indistinguishable from the darkness?

### **Power**

The third word used to describe the New Testament church is power. Acts 5:11 records the first time the church is called "the church." In Greek it is the *Ecclesia*. *Ec* meaning "out," and *clesia* meaning "called." The church is made up of the "called out" ones. Called out from what? From the world and its crazy, mixed up sense of values. Called out from the world and its convoluted priorities. The church is to be a "called out" people who function in the power of the holy Spirit.

We hear a lot about the Holy Spirit these days and I'm glad. I want to read about him, hear about him, talk about him, get to know him better. But does it concern you as it does me that most of the talk is about the joy of the Spirit and not very much is said about the *Holy* Spirit? About his purity? About his holiness?

I ask God to sensitize me. I ask God to sensitize you. I want us to be so in tune with him we will instantaneously be offended by sham and hypocrisy and pretense done in the name of Jesus.

The flesh and the Spirit cannot co-exist. When Ananias and Sapphira went the way of the flesh our text says, "Fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard these things" (5:11). I pray, and God guard my lips, I pray this church will be so filled with the purity of the holy Spirit no one can remain part of it who isn't willing to do God's work in God's way.

I pray this body will be so filled with awe of God's holiness our actions, our attitudes, our motives, our everything! will be guided by the glaring light of the Holy Spirit. When that happens, there will not only be a holy fear in here, there will be awe out there. Not because this church has political clout. Not because this church has economic resources. Not because this church has social status. But because this church is pure and its presence in this city exposes the ugliness around us and makes it uncomfortable for ugliness to stay.

Acts 5:12-16 picks up where the story left off. Miracles start to happen again! Healings occur! A purified church is a powerful church and size had nothing to do with it. Quality did. About three years ago, when God made it plain to me he was serious about the construction of a Christian Life Center in this city, he told me something and I'm going public with it this morning. God told me this is going to be a Gideon operation. "Lord," I asked, "what does that mean?" He answered, "I am not going to do it with a large number of people."



I heard about a church down in southern California who built without going into debt and that inspired me. I said, "If they can do it so can we." After we had publically and officially committed ourselves to build without going into debt, I discovered that church has 20,000 people a week going to that church with a population base of 7,000,000. We have about 2,000 people touched by this church each week with a population base of 200,000. Frankly I was scared and then the Lord said, "Don't be afraid, John. He reminded me that Gideon started with 32,000 soldiers and that was too many. So he got rid of half of them and there were still too many. He wound up with 300 faithful warriors and God said, "John, Gideon got the job done with 300 people and *this* is going to be a Gideon operation. I'm not going to need large numbers of people. I'm going to do it with a small number of my people who are willing to do things my way." (Editor's note: That's exactly what happened. The Bakersfield Christian Life Center was funded by about 300 families!)

When we view God's stuff as being our stuff we better look out! There is a warning here, but there is also a lovely challenge here and I want to leave you with that challenge: look what you'll be missing if you are not part of what God is doing. God *is* (present tense!) performing a miracle here. Don't miss the joy of being part of that.

The balance of our text records the clear difference between those who dropped out and those who became part of the great thing God was doing. A Spirit-filled church is not a *stagnant pool*. A Spirit-filled church is a *flowing stream* of influence that stretches out and reaches up. What we give to God, he takes. What he takes, he cleanses by the blood of Jesus. What he cleanses by the blood of Jesus, he fills with his Holy Spirit. What he fills with his Holy Spirit, he uses for his purpose.

*When we view our stuff as being God's stuff he has the stuff to do whatever he wants to do. But when we view his stuff as being our stuff, look out! Look out!*

## The Church Established - Part 11

Acts 5:17-42

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Key Truth: Strict obedience by God's people will meet both opposition and honor.

Attribute: God is Just

To get a toehold on today's text and fully appreciate the events recorded here, look at Acts 5:12 and note the prevailing atmosphere in which the apostles were ministering. "Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles." Skipping down to verse 15: "So that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and pallets, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed."

Clearly, the prevailing atmosphere in which the apostles were ministering was marked by the miraculous. If you've never studied the miracles of the Bible I urge you to do so. Among other things you will discover they are clustered in various sections of scripture. As you pursue that clustering you will see they are related to periods of history when God was doing a new thing and was attempting to catch people's attention. As far as the miracles alluded to in *our text*, it is clear God was using them to validate the ministry and message of the apostles.

There is an interesting reference here to Peter's shadow. Please notice, the text does not say Peter's *shadow* healed anyone, it simply reflects a custom prevalent during the first century.

One of the basic principles of hermeneutics is the Historical Perspective principle which requires us to place a passage of scripture in its historical context. For instance, the Eastern mind believed a shadow had a life all its own. Much like words. Words to them were alive. A word of blessing was something to get in on. If another person was being blessed, folks would try to position themselves to get in the pathway of that word of blessing. Conversely, if someone was being cursed, they ducked to escape that curse.

To the Eastern mind a shadow had an energy or life of its own and was considered to be the reflected energy or life of the person who cast it. Since Peter was a man of blessing, people wanted as much of that blessing as possible. If they couldn't actually touch him they wanted his shadow to fall on them.

Our key truth for today declares, *Strict obedience by God's people will meet both opposition and honor*. It is divided into two parts. One has to do with *opposition*. The other deals with *honor*.

### **Opposition**

Raw obedience always spawns vigorous opposition, and that's exactly what happened. "But the high priest rose up and all who were with him, that is, the party of the Sadducees, and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the common prison" (Acts 5:17).

Here is something new. Earlier passages in Acts have been specific that it was Peter and John who had been put in jail. They were the strong natural leaders in the group of twelve and it was they who were imprisoned. Now, however, it is not *just* Peter and John, but *all* the apostles! They were *all* put in prison. Satan was escalating his attack on the body of Christ and church history records how, later on, not only the leaders but all believers were subjected to severe oppression.

Verses 19 through 21 reveal God's counter offensive: "*But* at midnight an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, 'Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.' and when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and taught."

Here we are introduced to a series of counter actions on God's part to protect his people. Look at how often the little word "but" shows up in our text.

"They arrested them and put them into the common prison, *but* . . ." (Acts 5:18).

"We found the prison securely locked and the sentries standing at the doors, *but* . . ." (Acts 5:23).

"We strictly charged you not to teach in his name, *but* . . ." (Acts 5:29).

"When they heard this they were enraged and wanted to kill them. *But* . . ." (Acts 5:33,34).

### **Angelic Deliverance**

God had a resource available at that moment which he used in a measured way to protect his body. So not only were *all* jailed, *all* were delivered by an angel of the Lord. In scripture the word "angel" represents several possibilities: supernatural beings, a messenger, or, as in the book of Revelation, a real live, flesh and blood human being. A pastor or elder of one of the seven churches. By definition a miracle is a natural or supernatural event accompanied by precise timing to give glory to God, and our text does not require that we choose between a supernatural being or spirit-filled human being. It *does* demand that we observe the precise timing which glorifies God.

*At the very moment* these men were in prison and the adversary was asleep, an angel of the Lord came, opened the prison doors and let them out along with this injunction: "Go . . . stand . . . speak . . . the words of this life." The direction was not "run for your lives," or "get out of town because your necks are in a noose." Their deliverance was not for their *safety*, but for their *service*. God was not setting them free so they could be ministered *to*. He was setting them free so they could minister! So they could share the word regarding "this life." What life? The life of Jesus, of course. But more than that, *life in Jesus*. The life of repentance and forgiveness. The life of hope for the hopeless. Power for the powerless. Love for the loveless. Life for the lifeless. "Go . . . stand . . . speak . . . the words of *this* life."

### **The Swift and Strict Obedience of the Apostles.**

"When they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak" (Acts 5:21). As soon as the sun was up they were back at the very same place where they had previously been arrested! Talk about the courage of one's convictions. Talk about clear evidence this was not a put up job, a bit of hanky panky where one of their friends bribed the prison guards to let them out. Here is clear proof they were taking seriously God's involvement in their lives. God had performed a miracle to his glory and had given them specific instruction as to where they were to go and what they were to do. To their credit, they did it. *They did it!!*

### Application

There's an important application for us. I'm confident Satan desires to imprison all of us. Not by putting us behind steel bars. Or with metal shackles on our wrists and ankles. He would imprison us behind the bars of social convention. The bars of personal oppression. The prison bars of "it's never been done this way."

I was talking with a young man who rejoiced in what he sensed to be the Spirit of God at work in our lives and he said, "Do you think the day will come in our church when some of the New Testament ministries like words of prophecy and physical healing will actually occur?" I heard myself answer, "Probably not." I've felt God needs a kind of middle of the road group which is neither charismatic nor non-charismatic in the traditional sense of those terms. A group of people who are comfortably in the middle. Who are feeling their way into a deeper walk of "fullness in Christ" (Colossians 2:10). Later I got to praying about that conversation. "Lord," I said, "that may be the way *I* think, but if it is not the way *you* think, do it your way. Don't let me and my conventionality, my balance wheel, keep us from experiencing your best. Don't let Satan imprison us behind the bars of our religious traditions. Keep us free."

Satan would imprison us. He would imprison us behind the bars of financial bondage so we're not free to serve God and give to God's work. He would imprison us in a thousand different ways *if we let him!* But God will deliver *all* of us, not just the pastor and leaders, *all* of us. I rejoice in the deliverance I am witnessing. I am seeing people touched by this ministry discovering their freedom in Christ and rejoicing in the healing God is giving at the deepest levels of their need. I believe God wants to deliver *all* of us. For what reason? Not to make us comfortable, but to make us available! Not to make us safe, but to empower us to serve. To deliver us from "me-on-my-mind-itis" so we can respond to the needs of others. To free us, not to be ministered *to*, but to minister.

### Good News - Bad News

Acts 5: 21b - 25 records what may be the original good news - bad news story. I was kidding with Bill Taylor and Bill Simpkins about this last week. "Have you heard any new good news-bad news jokes?" I asked. Taylor said, "Yes! One day the first mate on one of those old ships powered by oarsmen chained to their oars went down to the hold and said, 'Men, I've got good news and bad news. The good news is you get a double portion of porridge for supper tonight. The bad news is that after dinner the captain wants to go water skiing.'" This morning Simpkins walked in and said, "I remembered one! The good news is that they have invented a car that gets 100 miles to a gallon. The bad news is that it burns coffee!"

Well, Acts 5:21b-25 may be the original good news-bad news story. Let's see if we can pick up the sense of it. In the later half of verse 21 we have a cluster of Israel's elite. The high priest, the Sadducees, the Sanhedrin and all the senate. Whether "the senate" is another name for the same group or represents another collection of the elders of Israel isn't clear. Scholars have differing points of view on that, but in any case here is a gathering of Israel's elite.

They ordered the prison guards to bring in all twelve apostles to be judged. After a while the officers return and said, "We have some good news and some bad news. The good news is 'we found the prison securely locked and the sentries standing at the doors.' The bad news is 'when we opened (the door) we found no one inside'" (Acts 5:23).

You can imagine the response. Verse 24: “When the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were much perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to.” They were perplexed because they didn’t believe in the miraculous. It never occurred to them that an angel of the Lord had set God’s people free. They feared there was inside support for this group. That a member of the prison guard had been “bought off” and /or there was a mole, a secret supporter in the Sanhedrin itself. If that were true the whole establishment was threatened and they didn’t know “what this would come to.”

While they were busy talking about what this might mean to them, another fellow came in, grabbed the high priest by the coat tails and said, “You’re not going to believe this, but the fellows you’re looking for are in Solomon’s court preaching.” That had to be the topper. The apostles who had been in prison got loose, but instead of running for their lives, had the unmitigated gall to go back to the temple square and began teaching the very message they had been told not to teach!

Verse 26 tells us the captain of the officers went outside, brought them in “*without violence*” -- in contrast to verse 18 when they “laid hands on them” (KJV) and unceremoniously tossed them in the pokey -- and the high priest began an interrogation which escalates to an accusation and ends with an amazing declaration.

### **The Interrogation**

“And the high priest questioned them” (Acts 5:27). Your King James version will have some question marks after some of the next questions but the newer translations eliminate those and go immediately to the accusatory nature of the question. It really isn’t an interrogation. It’s an accusation.

### **The Accusation**

“We strictly charged you not to teach in this name” (Acts 5:28). Notice the reference to “this name,” and at the end of verse 28, “this man’s blood.” No mention of Jesus Christ. To do so would have given credence to *that* name and *that* man. A Jewish custom was to turn the socially unacceptable into non-persons by refusing to use their names. That’s what happened here. There was no reference to Jesus Christ, just “we strictly charged you not to teach in *this* name” and “you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.”

### **The Declaration**

Right in the middle of verse 28 is this amazing declaration: “You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching.” The incredible nature of that declaration cannot be appreciated until you remember who is making it. This is not a friend of the family of God. This is *the* leader of the opposition. The *high* priest, who didn’t realize what he was saying. But Peter did, and you can almost hear Peter’s spontaneous, internal praise: “Yes, Lord, we have. You commanded us to go and teach in *Jerusalem* first. We did that and we’re succeeding. The *high* priest says we’ve filled *Jerusalem* with the Good News. Thank you, Lord. Pretty soon our task here will be done and we’ll be reaching out to Judea and Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!” The high priest had no idea what he was saying, but Peter did. Peter understood that by obeying Christ’s command, blessing was coming. “You have filled *Jerusalem* with this teaching.”

With the charge, *all* the apostles, not just Peter, got into the act. “But Peter *and the apostles* answered” (Acts 5:29). I like to think it went something like this:

*Peter* started it off by saying, “As I told you the last time, we must obey God.”

*John* added, “Yes, we must *obey* God. Some argue and debate about him, but we must *obey* him.”

*Andrew*, who was such a strong early witness probably said, “We *must* obey God. Others *may* obey him. Others may crawfish about the issue, but what God has done in our lives is so great, so fantastic, so life-changing we don’t have an option. We *must* obey God.”

*James*, who was so practical, may have continued, “Yes, we can’t speak for you, but those of us who have been with Jesus *must* obey God.”

They were following *the* master principle guiding the New Testament Church: obey God! If we want to be the church God wants us to be, we too, must obey *God*, not the ideology of this world. We must *obey* God, not just talk about him and think about him and debate about him, we must *obey* him. *We* must obey him. If we are to be a New Testament Church *we must obey God*. That is *the* Master Principle for a New Testament Church. The apostles articulated it and we must do it.

About that time I think tough-minded *Phillip* spoke up and said something the Sanhedrin did not want to hear: “The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom *you killed* by hanging him on a tree.”

*Bartholomew* probably butted in and said, “Yes, and furthermore, God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior.”

Maybe *Matthew* added, “To give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. Because, you see, sirs, I once was a tax collector and I cheated people. I felt guilty about it, but Jesus touched me and cleansed me. He forgave me and made me whole. That’s why God has exalted him: to give repentance and forgiveness to *you*.”

*Thomas*, I’m conjecturing here, but I think *Thomas* was the one who said, “We are witnesses to these things. I was a doubter. When he appeared to us I asked him to show me the nail prints in his hands and the spear wound in his side. I didn’t believe he was alive any more than you do. But I’m a witness. I was there. Remember what I *was*? Remember what *we* were? Look at what we have *become*. We are witnesses. We are living evidence that Jesus has risen from the dead.”

*Mathias*, who took Judas’ place, may have finished off this revolving witness by saying, “The Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him is also a witness.” *Mathias* was with the others on the day of the Pentecost. He *knew* what it meant to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to operate with a Power Source beyond his own. Talk about team preaching. This was a round-robin sermon as voice after voice was raised to share “the word about *this life*” This life of Jesus. This life *in* Jesus.

### **The Second Official Offer to Israel's Leaders**

This was the second official offer of the King and his kingdom to the leaders of Israel. There had been a first official offer made by Peter and John to the Sanhedrin. Now the Supreme Court of Israel, the most powerful group in the nation, was having a second chance to receive the King and his kingdom. But they didn't. Verse 33 explains they were enraged. As someone has said, "The same sun that softens wax, hardens clay." They were *convicted*, but they were not *converted*. Their reaction was to kill the apostles. They had tried threats. They had tried imprisonment. These had not worked, so they "wanted to *kill* them" (Acts 5:33).

What effect is "the word of *this* life" having on you today, or for that matter, any day? When people empowered by the Holy Spirit talk of "*this* life in Christ, *this* walk in the Spirit," does it harden you? Or does it soften you? Does it make you eager for more of God's best? Or does it make you rebellious, or worse yet, indifferent? The S-o-n who shines on all softens some and hardens others depending on their internal response. What is your response today to "the word of *this* life"?

### **Gamaliel**

To help in the process of extending a second offer of the King and his kingdom to Israel, God had a person whom he could use. His name was Gamaliel. Gamaliel was an interesting fellow. He's described in verse 34. He was "a Pharisee." Unlike the Sadducees, the Pharisees believed something. They believed in the law. They were committed to defending the law. They were divided into two schools: the school of Shammai which held to a strict interpretation of the law and the school of Hillel which was a little more open.

Gamaliel was part of the school of Hillel. He was a little more open to what God was doing. More than that, he was a distinguished "teacher of the law." According to ancient Jewish records, Gamaliel was the first of seven famous rabbis to be given the "Distinguished Teacher's Award" and the title of *Rabbon*, a special designation assigned to just seven rabbis, one of whom was Gamaliel.

As verse 34 explains "he was honored by all the people." Gamaliel stood to speak and gave the Supreme Court a principle with two illustrations to support it. First, he mentions a man named Judas (Acts 5:36) who was the leader of a revolutionary movement with about 400 followers. When Judas died his followers were dispersed and his movement came to nothing. In verse 37 Gamaliel refers to a fellow named Judas, the *Galilean*, who also was an insurrectionist. When he died, those who followed him were scattered and his movement also died.

The principle Gamaliel was articulating is recorded in Acts 5:38, 39: "So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this understanding is of men, it will fail; *but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!*"

To his credit Gamaliel said that much. But a host of questions beg to be answered. Why didn't he say more? Was he not convinced Jesus was the Christ? How much proof did he need? He had the life of Jesus which he had observed from afar. Jesus was widely known. Everything about him was an open book. Gamaliel knew Jesus was of the House of David. That he had been born in Bethlehem. That his coming was accompanied by signs and wonders and miracles,

all of which the Hebrew Scriptures had predicted.

How much proof did Gamaliel need? The reality of Christ's resurrection was witnessed by many. These men who were on trial were living witnesses to the life changing power of Jesus. Gamaliel knew the forty year old fellow who had been healed a few days earlier was a cripple from birth, yet there he was walking and leaping and praising God. How much proof did Gamaliel need before he was willing to make a commitment to Jesus?

How much proof do *you* need? You're in this worship center today and you're crawfishing between the Lordship of Jesus and the lordship of self. You're trying to decide whether or not God can work a miracle in you. How much proof do you need? Look at what he has already done in the people around you. Look at the volume of evidence. Look at the changed lives. Look at the spiritual renewal. Look at the miracles. The evidence is overwhelming. How much proof do you need to get in on what God is doing?

We can only wonder what might have happened if Gamaliel had said, "Men, the evidence is in. God is doing Something Big! Look at these twelve guys we've been talking to. Remember what they *were*? Look at what they *are*. God is alive! He is at work in Israel. Let's get in on what God is doing."

Gamaliel is a poor example for us all. God does not want a compromise. He wants a commitment! Oh, the curse of excessive caution. Oh, the negativity of neutrality. Oh, the wastefulness of wait-and-see-ism. We waste our opportunities. We waste our chance to get in on the action. We waste our moment of destiny. Gamaliel did. Don't follow his example! Acts 5:40 - 42 says the leaders of Israel took his advice -- *up to a point*. They didn't *kill* the apostles, they just beat them. They charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

### **And Honor**

This brings us to the second half of our key truth: *Strict obedience by God's people will meet both opposition and honor*. "Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor in the name of Jesus" (Acts 5:41). They were *honored* to suffer *dishonor* for the sake of Jesus.

In Greek this little word "worthy" means more than *kind* of worthy. It means "genuinely deserving." They rejoiced that they were "genuinely deserving" of being beaten in the name of Jesus. On the Mount of the Beatitudes their Lord had said, "Blessed are you when men revile you and curse you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven" (Matthew 5:11,12a).

When they had been indecisive, when Peter denied his Lord, when the humanity of all twelve of them leaked out and they failed him, I'm sure they wondered, as some of *us* do, "Lord, will there ever be a day when I'll have the guts to stand for you? Regardless of the cost? Regardless of what the world says? Regardless of the laughter and jeers? Regardless of the pain? Will there ever come a time when because of my faithfulness I will be blessed as they were?" To the glory of God, they passed the test! They were honored to be *dishonored* for Jesus. They went on speaking in his name, and the world has not been the same!



God grant there shall be a quality of life about us which identifies us as being his. That not in a masochistic way which finds neurotic pleasure in pain, but in a healthy way, we shall delight in the dishonor which comes from being associated with Jesus. Right now it's fairly popular to be a Christian in our country, but that's not true in the rest of the world. America is one tiny star of hope in a deep, dark night of tribulation directed at the church all over the world. And the day is coming when it won't be easy to witness for Jesus in America either. God grant we will be ready. God grant we will be so filled with the Holy Spirit, so controlled and dominated and energized by him, that when the test comes, we too will meet it with joy and the honor of being *dishonored* for the name of Jesus.

## **The Church Established - Part 12**

Acts 6:1-7

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Key Truth: Spiritual servers as well as spiritual leaders are essential to achieving God's plan.

Attribute: God is Master Planner

With a pen or pencil draw a baseball diamond. At home plate put "Spirit." At second base put "flesh." At first base put "positive" and at third base put "negative." Home plate: Spirit. Second base: flesh. First base: positive. Third base: negative. Now keep that graphic handy because we'll come back to it later in this teaching.

A recurring theme in the book of Acts is Satanic oppression of the fledgling body of Christ accomplished by his harnessing the alternating currents of *internal* and *external* strife to create division and impede progress.

Acts 4:1-22 describes *external* strife directed toward the body as Peter and John are placed in jail. Acts 5:1-16 records how, in the persons of Ananias and Sapphira, *internal* strife strikes the church.

Acts 5:17-42 details *external* strife as all 12 of the apostles are placed in prison.

Acts 6:1-7 reveals the potential for *internal* strife and how, by obeying the leading of the Holy Spirit, the apostles were able to defuse it.

Acts 6:18 - 7:60 covers *external* strife as Stephen is arrested and ultimately becomes the first Christian martyr.

Satan was busy harnessing the alternating currents of *internal* and *external* strife to create division and impede progress. He *was* not, and I might add, *is* not willing to let the church go unchallenged when it is committed to, and actualizing, an effective spiritual growth ministry.

### **The Perils of Growth**

When growth occurs, situations develop which are not anticipated. The New Testament Church, like our own church, was experiencing growing pains. The numbers of members were increasing dramatically. When there had only been twelve followers, Jesus was able to minister to them personally. When they grew to 120 it was still a close knit group. Following Pentecost when 3,000 were added, it continued to be a manageable ministry. But as the number of converts increased at an accelerated rate and multitudes came to know the Savior, the apostles had less and less time and energy to pay attention to the important everyday details of a spiritual growth ministry committed to excellence.

The result was a seed bed in which bitterness could have taken root. The job had become too big for the twelve, and the perils of growth emerged. We might conclude: that because so much was happening, that because so many new converts were coming to the Savior, that because so many were being baptized, they were so busy they didn't have time to get into trouble. But the business of growing and overseeing that growth created soil in which misunderstanding could have taken place.

One of the things I love about the Bible is that it is so honest. Our text tells us about a congregation of born again, Spirit-filled, growing Christians which was experiencing problems. I'm not happy they had internal problems, but I *am* happy we are told about those problems. It helps us understand our own numerical growth and the growing pains *we* are experiencing.

The issue facing the New Testament Church was this: the widows of some of the members were being overlooked in the common meal the body shared together when they met in the various house churches. It was not a quarrel between Jews and Greeks because, for the most part, the body was Jewish. Instead it reflected a family quarrel within Judaism which went back hundreds of years and had very deep roots.

Luke refers to the people involved as "Hellenists" and "Hebrews" (Acts 6:1). The Hebrews were Palestinian Jews who had grown up in the promised land, had been exposed to temple life, and were proud of this heritage. The Hellenists were Jews of the dispersion. The fall of the divided kingdom ended with Israel, the northern kingdom, being scattered over the known world. Judah, the southern kingdom was being carried off into captivity. The Jews of the dispersion put down roots in different lands. They were subjected to the influence of Greek culture which was called Hellenism. Greece was the dominant world power at that time. Alexander the Great was an enthusiastic promoter of Greek culture. He saw to it that Greek ideas, Greek thought-forms, Greek mores and the Greek language were introduced to that part of the world.

The "Hellenists" referred to in Acts 6:1 were Jews who had grown up under this Grecian influence. Most of them did not speak Hebrew or Aramaic, they spoke Greek. As a result, when they got together in Jerusalem there was a communication problem between themselves and the non-Greek speaking "Hebrews" also mentioned in verse 1.

Most of their differences were bridged when they became followers of Jesus, but the language barriers posed problems of a practical sort as they tried to communicate with each other. The Hellenist widows who spoke Greek could not communicate with the other widows who spoke Hebrew. As a consequence there was the potential for major misunderstanding and conflict.

### **Dealing with Social Issues**

It's important to note the New Testament Church took its social responsibilities seriously. It recognized the need to respond to the needs of the genuinely needy. One of the important ministries in the church was the Organization of Widows. We haven't time to make a careful study of it this morning, but in 1 Timothy 5:3-16 Paul gives extensive directions to Timothy regarding the treatment of widows.

The New Testament Church clearly had a sense of social responsibility and took it seriously. As growth accelerated some of the people got lost in the shuffle. Who were they? They were the widows of the Hellenists, the Greek-speaking Jews. Where were they? They were in Jerusalem, meeting in Hebrew homes where Hebrew and/or Aramaic was spoken. You can see, can you not, the potential peril growing out of tremendous growth? There were so many new faces they hardly knew each other. The Hellenists widows were a bit defensive because they weren't "true blue Jews." If one of them tried to communicate a need and couldn't, one could understand why she might feel she was being slighted.

What's important is that the Hellenist widows *expressed* their sense of disunity in a positive way. They took their complaint to the proper people: the apostles. The neglect had not been intentional and their criticism was not meant to be destructive. It was a sign of *soundness* in the body. They loved one another enough and they cared about their unity enough to speak with loving candor to one another about this threat to their unity.

That leads me to that baseball diamond graphic I gave you earlier and I must credit Bill Aram for this insight. He and I were talking about what God would have me say to you this morning and he pointed out that the issue is not whether we're positive or negative, but whether we are under the direction of the Spirit or under the domination of the flesh. To complete the graphic, draw an arrow pointing upward from second base to home plate. Then, from home plate draw an arrow pointing to first base and another arrow aimed at third base. Bill pointed out that when we are "at home" *in the Spirit*, whatever we say has a healing effect upon the body.

I praise God for Spirit-filled criticism. I praise God for people who care enough about "the spirit of unity within the bonds of peace" that they lovingly raise questions of concern which left untended could threaten our unity. When it is done *in the Spirit* it is always healing. Furthermore, if *we* are in the Spirit, even though the person making the criticism may be operating in the flesh, if *we* are in the Spirit we *receive* their words *in the Spirit* and are free to get the blessing God wants to give.

### **The Response of the Apostles**

The apostles did not ignore the criticism. They did not call it ridiculous or trifling or petty or trivial. They took it seriously. They responded to it swiftly. And they proposed a solution which was simple, scriptural and spiritual. "And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word'" (Acts 6:2-4).

### **A Simple Solution**

Taking this concern seriously, the first thing the apostles did was acknowledge their unique role in the life of the body. "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God." The twelve of them had *personal* knowledge of Jesus. They had walked with him and talked with him. They knew him up close and personal. They saw him die. They were with him following his resurrection. They were *eye witnesses* to the essentials of the Gospel.

It was *not* a matter of greater or lesser service, but of wiser use of their time, talent and experience. They were *not* saying, "We're too good to do menial tasks like wait on tables." They were *not* drawing a distinction between clergy and laity. They *were* saying, "It is important that we maximize our uniqueness as eye witnesses to Jesus and do the things only *we* are equipped to do. Other members of the body can perform other ministries, but at this point in time our role is unique and we must preach the word."

That there was and is no greater or lesser service when it is done in Jesus' name is affirmed by the fact the apostles use the same Greek word to describe the ministry of these seven other men, as they used for their *own* ministry. In verse 2 the word is translated "serving." In verse 4 it is

translated “ministry.” Both are servant tasks. The service of tables. The ministry of the word. They are the same.

### **A Scriptural Solution**

This lack of greater or lesser quality of ministry is further shown by the fact that not just *anybody* was selected to care for the widows. This was a common task, but it was to be done in an uncommon way in the *name* of Jesus and to the *glory* of Jesus. Certain qualifications were spelled out and extreme care was used in selecting those who would perform this ministry. “Pick from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3).

The number seven is interesting and has a sacred significance, but it is the *character* of this seven I want to focus on. *First*, they were “from among you.” That is to say, they were not outsiders. They were faithful, available, teachable members of the “local” church. *Second*, they were “men of good repute.” That is to say, there was a consistency and integrity about them. What they said was supported by what they did. Their deeds and words were synchronized. *Third*, they were “full of the Spirit.” They were *routinely*, as a matter of *constancy*, controlled by love so they thought, spoke, and acted lovingly. Often we think of the Spirit-filled life as a mystical experience. It *can* be that, but it is practical as well. These seven men were not only intensely spiritual, they were thoroughly practical. They saw to it that hungry people were fed. *Fourth*, they were “full of wisdom.” In plain English they had sanctified “horse-sense.” They were blessed with the gift of good judgement.

### **A Spiritual Solution**

In verse 5 we have the response of the body to the direction of the apostles. They liked the idea and selected seven men. The names of these guys are listed here and notice they are Greek names. This suggests a couple of possibilities. They were Hellenists and sympathetic to the Hellenists widows, or they spoke Greek and were able to bridge the communication gap. They could listen to the widows concerns, evaluate their legitimacy and respond accordingly.

### **Nicolaus**

Three of the names listed are especially interesting. One is Nicolaus. He was a proselyte from Antioch, that is, he was a convert to Christianity *not* from Judaism, but from the *Greek* religions. Some scholars draw a connection between Nicolaus and the Nicolaites who, because they tried to amalgamate Christian and non-Christian teachings created real problems for the church in Asia Minor. Revelation 2:6 has Jesus saying he hates the Nicolaites and commends the church in Ephesus for rejecting them. If that be true, we can understand why, in 2 Timothy 2:6, Paul tells young Timothy to be careful in his selection of leaders. They are not to be recent converts lest being in a position of leadership, they lack discernment and go off in all directions.

### **Philip**

The name of Philip is also interesting. We’ll learn more about him later on when we find him ministering in Samaria after Stephen had been martyred.

### **Stephen**

And, of course, there is Stephen. He is called a man “full of the Spirit.” Luke will devote the balance of chapter 6 and all of chapter 7 to what happens to Stephen. For the moment notice how Stephen got his start. He didn’t discover God’s will for him by sitting around twiddling his

thumbs and brooding over “what shall I do with my life?” Or “what is God’s will for me?” Stephen found his place in God’s will by meeting the nearest need. He did whatever he was asked to do, however simple. And he did it with the humility Jesus evidenced when he washed the disciples feet and prepared breakfast for them on the shore of Galilee.

We’re all familiar with rags to riches stories. We know about the office boy who becomes president of the company. What the Spirit is trying to teach us here is that small jobs done to the glory of God are preparation for larger tasks. As I thought about this in relationship to my own life, I remembered my first church job was taking the offering at a youth meeting. It lasted about a minute. Later I was given a chance to sing in a quartet. Then I was asked to lead the singing for the youth group, followed by an invitation to do so for the whole church at a Sunday night service. Out of that came an interest in a ministry of music, and later a commitment to the preaching ministry which led to the ministry we share today. It all began by my taking the offering in a youth meeting.

*You can find God’s will for you by meeting the nearest need. By doing whatever you’re asked to do, however menial, because a common task done to the glory of Jesus Christ becomes uncommon in its ultimate influence in your life.*

### **A Special Ministry for a Special Need**

Acts 6:5 marks the beginning of specialized ministries to meet special needs. New situations called for new solutions, new provisions, new systems of organization. But more than that, it called for new people who, because they met the peril of division in the power of the Holy Spirit, led the church to deeper unity and greater strength.

Today the church at large is not always Spirit-led and often employs carnal solutions to the issues confronting it. Can you imagine what would have happened had the apostles said, “This is too small a matter to get excited about.” Or suppose the Hellenists had said, “We’re not getting fed. We’re going to start our own church and feed ourselves.” Human nature being what it is, the Hellenists would have soon divided up into the Hellenists from Africa, and the Hellenists from Galatia, and the Hellenists from Greece, and the Hellenists from Turkey. The body of Christ would have been cut into little pieces and would have lost the strength that comes from unity.

The story is told about a church called “The Church of God.” It had some problems so a group split off and called themselves “The True Church of God.” After a while they split again and the new group called itself “The Only True Church of God.” That’s sad! There was a time when there *was* a need for division. The early Church moved away from Biblical center. Correctives were needed. Voices like those of Luther, Calvin, Wesley and others spoke to specific heresies. Division occurred, but it was healthy. It brought the body of Christ back to Biblical center.

As far as I can see, the need for further division no longer exists. The need today is to bring the body together in such unity of love that regardless of our denominational blood type we happily work together to the glory of the Lord.

### **The Twelves Apostles as Role Models**

Acts 6:6 describes the twelve apostles as role models for us today. They were leaders and they led. The church was never meant to be a democracy. The church was designed to be a theocracy led by Spirit-filled people who personally and corporately seek to know and do God's will. Because the New Testament Church *had* that kind of leadership, the problem facing it was met with a simple, scriptural, spiritual solution which produced a successful outcome. "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

### **A Successful Outcome**

The body of Christ was bound together by love and committed to one purpose: serving God by serving people. There was freedom for the Spirit to work and because there is strength in unity "the word of God increased." Where? In *Jerusalem!* The heartland of Hebrew opposition. Among whom? The *priests* who were at the center of that opposition (Acts 7:7b). Why? Because of the manner in which this attack by Satan was met (Acts 7:6b). Through the easing of tension, the Holy Spirit was free to move and bless. The outcome was accelerated growth (Acts 7:7a).

The Spirit of God is at work in our midst today. God is doing Something Big in this church and Satan is not going to let it go unchallenged. More and more of us are learning what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. To be dominated and directed by love. We are discovering *all* work is *holy* work when it's done to the glory of God. The only question is whether we are in the *Spirit* or in the *flesh*. I am asking each of us to examine himself or herself to see if there is in us that which Satan can use to divide, and if so to deal with it at the cross. I am also asking that we look to see if there is that in us which the Spirit of God can use to unite, and if so to release it so the Holy Spirit is free to bless and use us, too!

## **The Church Established - Part 13**

Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-60

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Key Truth: When I give all I know of me to all I know of Him, the result is glory!  
God is Welcomer

Our text marks a major turning point in the Biblical narrative. Up until now, the church has been reasonably well thought of and widely received. At this point, however, a dramatic change occurs. Persecution mounts. The believers are scattered. The witness in Jerusalem comes to a climax and spreads outward to “all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

A key figure in this transition is Stephen. He was one of seven men appointed to serve tables. This was a common task to be done in the name of Jesus which required uncommon care in the selection of those who would do that task. Stephen is one of those chosen. He got started in ministry by meeting the nearest need and went far beyond that humble beginning to achieve greatness in the kingdom of God. As my dear, old Dad with two years of formal education would say, “Stephen, out did his self.”

### **The Christ-like Characteristics in Stephen.**

He progressed first of all because he was “a man full of faith and of the holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5). Verse 8 adds “Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.” There was a *gentleness* in Stephen not unlike that of his Lord, but there was also an *assertiveness*, a toughness if you will, not unlike that of Jesus. He expressed Christ-like qualities because the more Stephen gave of himself to what he knew of Jesus, the more Jesus was free to give himself back to Stephen.

Grace and power resulted in “wonders and signs,” that is, events which had a stop, look and listen quality about them. “Wonders:” things which caused people to pause and take notice. “Signs:” activities behind which there was a deeper meaning so the spiritually perceptive could see God working in the world.

### **He Was Willing to Witness in the Nearest Place.**

Not only did Stephen progress because of the Christ-like nature of his character, but also because he was willing to meet *the nearest need* and be a witness in the nearest place: *the place where he was*. “And Stephen full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs *among the people*. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called) and of the Cyrenians and of the Alexandrians, and of those of Cilicia and Asia, arose and disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom with which he spoke” (Acts 6:8 -10).

The Freedmen were people who had won their freedoms from slavery at the hands of Rome, either by an edict of the Roman ruler or by inheritance from their fathers who had become free. They were Hellenist Jews, that is, Jews of the dispersion. When they met to discuss the things of God it was in a synagogue composed of the Jews of the dispersion. Some were from Cyrene, a country in North Africa. Some were from Alexandria, part of the Delta region of Egypt. Bible scholars estimate there were over a hundred thousand Jews in and around Alexandria which



explains why, when Mary and Joseph heard the warning regarding the life of Jesus being in jeopardy, they went to Egypt. They could lose themselves in that mass of human beings and Jesus would have a chance to grow up in a safe place.

Then there were Jews from Cilicia and Asia, two provinces in Asia Minor which is now Turkey. Cilicia was the home province of Saul. Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia, was his birth place. When we put all this together we can conclude with some certainty that Stephen was a Hellenist who, along with other Jews of the dispersion, met in a Hellenists' synagogue in Jerusalem.

Stephen witnessed in the nearest place: the place where he was. He didn't wait until the ministry of the church expanded to "Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth." He didn't wait to catch sight of a larger sail on a distant horizon. He witnessed where he was, in the nearest place.

### **Stephen and Saul**

In all probability, among the other Jews of the dispersion who debated with him was a brilliant young man named Saul of Tarsus. As Saul sought to match wits with Stephen, he must have been impressed by the energy and consistency of Stephen's witness. Years later Saul, then Paul, took it upon himself to dedicate his brilliant mind to the task of writing a vigorous Christian apologetic detailing who Jesus was, what Jesus did, and who we are in relationship to who Jesus was and what Jesus did.

Stephen met the nearest need and went far beyond it. He began as a server and became a martyr. Someone has said, "There are no great men, there are only great needs which, in the course of circumstances, common men are called upon to meet." When those common men meet those great needs in the power of the holy Spirit, nothing remains the same.

### **The Oppression of Stephen**

Notice not only how Stephen started and progressed, but how he was oppressed. "But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. Then they secretly instigated men, who said, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses (who was synonymous with the law) and God (who was synonymous with the temple). And they stirred up the people and the elders and scribes, and they came upon him and seized him, and brought him before the council (the supreme court of Israel), and set up false witnesses who said, 'This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us.'"(6:10-14)

Energized as he was by the Holy Spirit, they could not match wits with him. Some of the things he said triggered fear which produced hostility. Whenever you see rage or uncontrolled anger, you can be certain that somewhere in the chemistry of that situation is fear. They were afraid because the tradition upon which they based so much was being questioned by Stephen as he preached Jesus. Their fear led to hostility which expressed itself in perjury.

Undoubtedly Stephen had said the teachings of Jesus would supersede the teachings of Moses which, in fact, they did. Jesus said, "You have heard it said . . . but I say to you." He raised the meaning of the law to a new level.

Undoubtedly Stephen had declared the superiority of the teachings of Jesus over those of Moses which was taken to be an attack upon Moses himself.

Undoubtedly Stephen shared the words of Jesus who said, “God is a Spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” inferring that temple worship was passe’.

Clearly, his comments were twisted into the blasphemous accusation that Jesus and Stephen spoke against God.

It is interesting to note these people were Hellenist Jews. Last week we learned the Hebrew Jews were proud of their superior standing in the house of Israel because they were Jews of Palestine. They had been exposed to the practices of temple life. They thought of themselves as being a rung or two up the social ladder from the Hellenists, the Jews of the dispersion.

It occurs to me the Hellenists may have been a bit defensive. A little insecure in their relationship with the other members of Israel. Maybe they felt a need to make up for these feeling of inferiority by greater assertiveness because, interestingly enough, it is the Hellenists who succeed in doing what the Hebrews could not do: bring down the wrath of the citizenry upon the followers of Jesus.

When this upstart of a layman, Stephen, stood to speak, the Hellenists were able to twist his words and turn the tide against him. “And they stir up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they seized him and brought him before the counsel” (6:12). They manage to turn the tide against the Christians who, up till then, had been well received. Now Christians became the focal point of severe persecution.

As I thought about this yesterday, I asked myself, “Are there in you, John, feelings of insecurity which become ground on which Satan can establish a beachhead?” I put the question to you. Are there areas of insecurity, feelings of inferiority in you which give Satan ground upon which to establish a beachhead so he can use you to turn the tide of influence against Jesus? One of the most consequential issues in this portion of scripture is that it was *part of the family of God* whom Satan used to do the greatest damage.

### **Stephen’s Preparation for Martyrdom**

Stephen was being prepared to become a martyr. “And gazing at him all who sat in the council saw that his face was like a face of an angel” (6:13). It doesn’t say Stephen was aware of any luminous quality about his countenance. It was observed by those who “sat in the council.” In Exodus we are told that when Moses came down from the mountain, he did not know his face shone. And it’s been my observation that when we are filled with the Holy Spirit and most available and useful to God, we are the last to know it, so devoid are we of self-consciousness.

“His face was like that of an angel’ (6:13). The Lord was preparing him for what lay ahead. You see, beloved, God always comes to us with two things: a task and a promise. The task requires our *faithfulness*. The promise results in his *fullness*. Hale and Wilder are two marvelous Christians with magnificent voices. One of their albums features this affirming word for all of us:

“Fear not, I am with thee,

Oh be not dismayed, for I am thy God  
I will still give thee aid.  
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand  
Upheld by my gracious omnipotent hand.  
The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose  
I will not, *I will not* desert to his foes.  
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,  
I'll never, no never, *no never* forsake.”

### **How Stephen Witnessed**

Acts 7:1-53 details his defense. It is one of the most penetrating, insightful statements of the human condition ever written. When this upstart of a laymen finished his scathing denouncement of the supreme court of his land, it was more than the members of the Sanhedrin could take. “When they heard these things they were enraged and they ground their teeth against him” (7:54).

Note the beastiality in that. So vicious was their attitude of mind, in an uncontrolled burst of outrage they were reduced to the level of animals. Their teeth were clenched. Every muscle in their faces was contorted with rage toward this man who had spoken the truth so clearly. And yet, in the presence of this hostility, Stephen was reinforced. “But (Stephen) full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, ‘Behold I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God’” (7:55,56).

Oblivious of the peril, Stephen saw, and then shared, something remarkable. Enthralled by the circumstance in which he found himself and the privilege of having spoken to the supreme court of the land on behalf of Jesus, Stephen saw a vision of victory and hope: Jesus *standing* with God!

The pastor who preceded me in Chicago was a brilliant scholar by the name of Ralph Shell. He was a man whom I admired greatly and loved deeply. Shortly after his retirement Ralph went to be with the Lord. During the last hours of his life on earth he was in a coma. Just prior to his death he awoke. His eyes were bright. On his face was a luminous look beyond description. He rose up off of his pillow, stretched forth his hands and looking across the room said, “Oh, what fools we mortals be,” fell back into the pillow, and was with Jesus. Stephen had a death like that.

Hebrews 10:12, records one of several instances in scripture in which Jesus is *seated* at the right hand of God. The Old Testament sacrificial system was one of ceaseless activity. The priests and high priest were constantly going in and out of the holy of holies to present sacrifice after sacrifice on behalf of the people of Israel. There was no chair in the holy of holies where they could sit, because they were too busy to sit! But Hebrews 10:10 says, “When Christ offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, *he sat down.*” His sacrifice was sufficient. When he offered, not the sacrifice of a beast but his own precious blood, *that* was a sacrifice sufficient to atone for all sin, for all time, and *Jesus sat down!* But here in Acts, as Stephen who began as a server and ends as a martyr, Jesus is so moved by the faithfulness of this man who laid down his life for his Savior, *Jesus stood up* to welcome Stephen home (7:55). Glory!!!

Andrew Curry was a Methodist circuit rider back in the early days of America. He rode on horseback from town to town where he preached the gospel and then moved on. One night between towns he stopped out on the prairie, unsaddled his horse, made himself a bit of supper, and using his saddle for a pillow drifted off to sleep. He had a dream. In his dream he was transported to heaven. At the gates of pearl he asked for admittance and Peter let him in. Then he asked to see God. Two angels lifted him up and with a mighty rushing wind carried him toward a great light which grew brighter and brighter until it blinded him. When they reached what seemed to be its center, the angels slowly lowered him onto something that resembled crystal.

The light was so bright he had to shield himself from it. Then, from high above, came a great voice which asked, "Who are you? And what do you want?" The voice was so powerful and the questions so penetrating Andrew Curry fell to his knees. "Who are you? And what do you want?" Andrew Curry tried to speak, but fear numbed his lips and dulled his tongue. One more time the voice said, "Who are you? And what do you want?" It seemed as if the pavement would part and Andrew Curry would slip into the jaws of hell, when he heard the soft shuffle of sandaled feet and the quiet ruffling of cloth on cloth.

A figure came and stood beside him. Hands reached down to help him up and as Andrew Curry opened his eyes he saw nail prints in those hands and knew it was well with his soul. As he stood there with the arm of Jesus around him, he heard a voice sweeter than that of a mother singing to her baby, sweeter than that of a bridegroom expressing his love to his bride, "Father, this is Andrew Curry. He witnessed for *me* to people on earth, and I am proud to witness for *him* before you, my father, in heaven."

Stephen had a vision like that. He saw Jesus *standing* at the right hand of God, and in a spontaneous ejaculation of praise, he shared what he saw. Out came the words, "Behold, I see the heavens open and the Son of man *standing* at the right hand of God" (7:56). That did it. That was too much. That was the straw that broke the camels back. The members of the Sanhedrin were well aware of the prophesy in Daniel 7:13-14, "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

When this upstart of a laymen linked *that* son of man with Jesus *the* Son of man, it either meant they had been incredibly wrong in their earlier judgement of Jesus, or *this* man was guilty of blasphemy and must be put to death. They were unable to admit *their* error, so they killed *him*. "They cast him out of the city and stoned him and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul" (7:58).

The process was not a pretty one, but let me describe it to you briefly. Outside the walls where it would not be an offense of the citizenry, the accused was taken to a pit about ten feet deep. He was stripped of his clothes. As he stood at the edge of the pit the chief witness hurled a boulder at him and knocked him into the pit. If the fall and boulder did not kill him the *next* witness came forward, took another boulder and hurled it down at him aimed at his chest to crush his heart. If *that* didn't kill him others hurl boulder after boulder until he died and was buried

beneath that pile of boulders. Such was the violent death to which Steven was subjected. It was a lynching. They tried to make it look legal by having witnesses there, but it was murder.

### **How Stephen Died**

“And as they were stoning Steven, he prayed, ‘Lord, Jesus, receive my spirit.’ And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, ‘Lord do not hold this sin against them.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (7:59, 60). I am sure you see the similarity between Stephen and Stephen’s savior.

Both were faithful witnesses on earth to what God was doing in the world.

Both had false charges brought against them.

Both were subjected to violent deaths.

Both of them looked to heaven as their hope.

Jesus said, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.” Stephen said, “Lord, Jesus, receive my spirit.” A beautiful confession that this body is just a house in which our spirit, our *true* self, lives.

Both prayed for their assaulters. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Stephen said, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

That Stephen could pray that prayer in the moment of his death is evidence he was a Spirit-filled man. A carnal man might have said, “God, are these the people for whom died Jesus? These brutes? These bigots? These madmen? Are these the kind of people for whom Jesus died?” *That’s* what a carnal response would have been? But the love by which Stephen lived was verified by the love with which Stephen died. He was filled with the Spirit from beginning to end, and he expressed that fullness in compassion for those who killed him.

Finally, both of them conquered death! Jesus by being resurrected. Stephen by being “absent from the body and present with the Lord.” He fell asleep on earth to awaken in the arms of Jesus. Psalm 116 says, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of one of his saints.” So I say to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, stand tall for Jesus. Stand firm on the foundation he has laid for you. Be faithful. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Then, when your moment of testing comes, yours too, will be the blessed inheritance of “absence from the body, present with the Lord.”

## The Church Established - Part 14

Acts 7:1-60

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Key Truth: God's plan precedes us, works through us and survives us.

Attribute: God is Eternal

The book of Acts divides nicely into three sections.

Chapters 1 through 7 deal with The Church Established and talk about their witness "in Jerusalem."

Chapters 8 through 12 focus on The Church Scattered and tell us about their witness "in Judea and Samaria."

Chapters 13 through 28 conclude with The Church Extended and discuss their witness "to the ends of the earth."

Chapters 1-7 tell us what happened and *how*.

Chapters 8-12 tell us what happened and *why*.

Chapters 13-28 tell us what happened and *where*.

This morning we come to the last of the first 7 chapters which describe *what happened and how*. It's a transition chapter from The Church Established to The Church Scattered. The key figure is Stephen and the theme of these sixty verses is the defense he made before the Supreme Court of Israel. He had been charged with two things (Acts 6:13b-14). First, "this man never ceases to speak words against *this holy place* (meaning the temple where God was said to dwell) and second, (he never ceases to speak words against) "*the law*, for we have heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth will destroy *this place*, and will change *the customs* which Moses delivered to us."

If those accusations were true, they were tantamount to blasphemy. The *temple* and the *law* were among the most sacred possessions of the Jews. As we shall see, Stephen's defense is to show that in the past God got along quite well without *either* the temple *or* the law. He also argues that despite God's boundless provisions, in the *past* his children repeatedly and flagrantly rebelled against him even as *they*, the Sanhedrin, were *now* rebelling against God's most gracious gift, his son, Jesus, their Messiah.

From beginning to end Stephen is concerned with presenting Jesus. He begins with Jehovah and ends with Jesus. In the process he makes it clear the Jehovah of the Old Testament and the Jesus of the New are one. As you listen to what he says it becomes evident this is not a defense of himself, but an indictment of his accusers.

I want to look at this text from the perspective of three tracks.

Track One is Rhetorical and will help us understand *what Stephen actually said*.

Track Two is Historical and will deal with *what Stephen said meant to the people who heard him say it*.

Track Three is Practical and will focus on *what Stephen said means to you and me, today!*

Let's see how his witness develops. "And the high priest said, 'Is this so?'" (Acts 7:1). Are these charges accurate? It's of interest to me that the high priest is the one who provided Stephen with this national forum before the supreme council of Israel from which yet another presentation of the gospel would be made to the children of Israel. Obviously the high priest didn't fully comprehend what he was saying, or to whom he was saying it, when he asked Stephen, "Is this so?"

Yesterday a friend shared a cute story about a little boy, 5 or 6 years old, who came home all battered up, eye puffed and lip bleeding. His mother said, "Tommy, what on earth happened, did you fall? Did you tumble on your bicycle?" Through his tears Tommy answered, "No, Chucky did it." His mother said, "But Tommy, Chucky is your best friend. Why would he do this to you?" "I said something that made him mad." "What did you say, honey? Did you attack him personally or his family?" "No, I said something mean about the Pope." "Don't you realize Chucky is a Roman Catholic?" And the little boy replied, "Yes, but I didn't realize the Pope was!"

The high priest knew the *apostles* were unique. He had several confrontations with them. Little did he realize this *layman*, Stephen, was also unique. Unaware of what he was doing the high priest offered a forum to a man "full of grace and power" (Acts 6:8). That's as risky as saying, "Stores Open" to a bunch of women at a one cent sale. As a teenager I dropped out of high school to go to work. One day the manager of the department store where I was working told me to open the door at a one cent sale. In a throw away comment he said, "Look out." I had no idea what he meant until I opened the door! After I picked myself off the floor I knew the next time I was asked to do that job, I'd use extreme care. Obviously the high priest didn't realize that to give a man "full of grace and power" (Acts 6:8) an opportunity to witness to the leaders of Israel was risky. So Stephen licked his chops and dug in. Knowing the best defense is an offense he began with a rehearsal of Israel's rebellious roots.

#### **Acts 7:2-8 Section One - Track One: What Stephen actually said.**

"Brethren and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia" (Acts 7:2). *This is key.* Stephen began by including himself as part of the family of God. His use of the designation "brethren and fathers" showed his respect for the elders of his nation, but it also made the point that *he* traced *his* roots to the same God *they* worship: "the God of glory." *This* God, your God, *my* God "appeared to our father, Abraham in Mesopotamia."

#### **Acts 7:2-8 Section One - Track Two: What Stephen said meant to those who heard him say it.**

Now remember, Stephen had been charged with attacking God as represented by the temple in *Jerusalem*. His response was this: "The God of glory, (your God and my God), met with our father Abraham" (Acts 7:2). Abraham wasn't Jewish, but God met with him. And where did God meet with him? In Jerusalem? No! In Mesopotamia. God dealt with him *there* and then walked with him as he moved along the path God prescribed. Even though Abraham had no place to call home, he was safe and secure because he enjoyed the protection of God. *Stephen is saying: from the start God made it clear he is the God of all people, everywhere. That thought made the Sanhedrin very uncomfortable. It meant they, the Jews, did not have an exclusive*

franchise with God!

**Acts 7:2-8 Section One - Track Three: What Stephen said means to you and me.**

God met Abraham *where* he was and *as* he was. That's important, because that's exactly where and how God meets us. In our Mesopotamia. In our rootlessness. But praise the Lord, God didn't leave Abraham *where* he was and *as* he was. God dealt with him *there* and then *walked with him* along a path God himself prescribed.

There were times in that journey when God led Abraham to places where (verse 5) he had "no inheritance." Where (verse 6) "his posterity would be aliens in a land belonging to others." Where (verse 7) their enemies would "enslave them and ill-treat them four hundred years." But here's the good part: even though Abraham had no place to call home, he and his posterity were safe and secure because they enjoyed the never failing protection of a loving, caring God who had a wonderful plan for their lives.

Like Abraham, God meets *us* in our Mesopotamia, our rootlessness, but God doesn't leave us *where* we are and *as* we are either. He initiates a paradigm shift called the new birth and then walks with us along "a path of righteousness for his name's sake" (Psalm 23:3). It's a path God himself prescribes.

Sometimes, like Abraham and his posterity we, too, are strangers in a foreign land. As the old gospel hymn puts it: "This world is not our home, we're just a passin' through." And yet like he did for Abraham and his posterity, everyday and in every way God graciously provides for us. We may have "no inheritance" here, but we have the promise of "a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens." Though rootless here and now, we will be the blest recipients of God's boundless provision in *our* "promised land," there and then.

Verse 8 forms a bridge from Abraham and Isaac to the twelve Patriarchs and leads us to the second section of Stephens argument which involves Joseph, one of those twelve.

**Acts 7:9-16 Section Two - Track One: What Stephen actually said.**

"And the Patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him and rescued him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, King of Egypt, who made him governor over Egypt and over all his household" (Acts 7:9a). A couple of things strike me as being very significant.

One. Where does God meet Joseph? In Egypt! A place far removed from the promised land! Stephen never strayed from his primary theme: *what God was doing and where God was doing it*. He reminds the Sanhedrin that in *Egypt* "God rescued Joseph out of his afflictions and gave him wisdom and favor" (Acts 7:9b). His brothers had sold Joseph into slavery. When a famine arose in Israel, Jacob, Joseph's dad, sent a delegation of those same brothers to Egypt for help. Joseph recognized them, but they didn't recognize him. Nor did they realize the second most powerful man in Egypt who held their lives in his hands was the brother they had so badly mistreated.

**Acts 7:9-16 Section Two - Track Two: What Stephen said meant to those who heard him say it.**



Here's what the *Sanhedrin* heard Stephen say. When God chose Abraham's off-spring to be his people they were not in *Jerusalem*. He didn't enter into covenant with them in the shadow of the *temple*. He did it in the shadow of the *pyramids*. The reference to Shechem as the burial place of some of Israel illustrious dead also got them shaking in their sandals. Shechem was not what they would call "kosher" territory and this reference to the heartland of *Samaria* irritated the dickens out of the Sanhedrin. The claim that God's concern has always reached *beyond Israel's geographic boundaries* was heresy and the mere suggestion made them furious.

**Acts 7:9-16 Section Two - Track Three: What Stephen said means to you and me.**

For us, these references are filled with hope! Like Joseph's brothers, you and I constantly allow our baser emotions to rule us. As a result, time after time we find ourselves in a self-made spiritual famine. But even as Joseph was the means by which God saved his *brothers*, so, too, the One from whom we turn aside is the source of *our* redemption. Our deliverance comes from *our* brother, Jesus, whom we often reject. Truly, through it all, God never fails to meet his part of the bargain.

**Acts 7:17-29 Section Three -Track One: What Stephen actually said.**

Stephens third point focused the attention of the Sanhedrin on Moses in his *early years*. "But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt . . ." Skipping down to verse 20, "At this time Moses was born, and was beautiful before God" Again, the focus is on *God's* activity. Where? In Egypt. And notice who thought Moses was beautiful. Not his mom or dad or grandma or grandpa, although they undoubtedly thought he was pretty neat. "He was beautiful before *God*"(Acts 7:20). Stephens concern throughout is with what *God* was doing and where God was doing it.

He continued his argument from history with a rehearsal of babies being slain, Moses being spared and raised as Pharaoh's grandson to become an outstanding leader wise in the ways of the world. But Moses had a higher destiny than an earthly throne and one day, when he saw a Jew being attacked by an Egyptian, to protect his Hebrew brother Moses killed the Egyptian. The next day he tried to act as a mediator between two Jews who were having a squabble. They had seen him commit murder and rejected his intervention. "Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?" (Acts 7:27b-28). Moses thought they would understand, but they didn't and rejected him who one day would be their deliverer!

**Acts 7:17-29 Section Three -Track Two: What Stephen said meant to those who heard him say it.**

Stephens argument got more pointed with his reference to Moses' *young adult years*. The subtleties were less subtle. The barbs more sharp. And the Sanhedrin got the point, if you'll excuse the pun. Here's what they heard: Like Joseph, Moses was a type of Christ. *Joseph* was a type of *Christ rejected* who became Israel's savior. *Moses* was a type of *Christ rejected* because he attempted to assert his Jewishness in the "*disguise*" of an Egyptian prince. Similarly, *Jesus* came on the scene in the "*disguise*" of a servant. He didn't *look* like Israel's Messiah and it infuriated the Jews when Stephen said he was!

**Acts 7:23-26 Section Three - Track Three: What Stephen said means to you and me.**

As we apply all this to our human condition, is it not true that: we, too, are often blinded by our

traditions and our bondage to doing what comes naturally so we don't recognize the Lord when we see him? We fail to understand it is "*God* (who) is at work in (us), both to will and to work for *his* good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). We are so blinded by our preoccupation with our oppressive situations the Lord is here and we can't see him! Does not scripture say, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11)? But God is faithful. He doesn't abandon us. As was true in the life of Moses, God's plan for us and his time for activating his plan are both right and Jesus, whom we earlier failed to recognize as such, becomes our deliverer.

**Acts 7:30-34 Section Four -Track One: What Stephen actually said.**

Point four in Stephens defense is most interesting. He refers to Moses and his *wilderness years* in the desert near Mount Sinai. "Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it he wondered at the sight; and as he drew near to look, the voice of the Lord came, 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. And the Lord said to him, 'Take off the shoes from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have surely seen the ill-treatment of my people that are in Egypt and heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt'" (Acts 7:30-34).

Once again, Stephen's focus is on *God's* activity. *God's* time comes. *God* provides an opportunity to confront his servant. *God* meets with his servant. *God* speaks to his servant. *God* explains his presence and his purpose to his servant. And *God* calls that meeting place "holy ground." That's key.

**Acts 7:30-34 Section Four -Track Two: What Stephen said meant to those who heard him say it.**

As we learned back in Acts 6:13 the Hellenist made a big deal of this "holy place." Stephen turns their phrase back on them by quoting God in relationship to a place God called "holy ground." Was that Jerusalem? No! It was the backside of the desert. What's the point? *All ground is holy ground when God and one of his children meet together there.* It has nothing to do with where the real estate is located! That, too, irked the members of the Sanhedrin.

**Acts 7:30-34 Section Four - Track Three: What Stephen said means to you and me.**

We, too, are often on the run as Moses was. We, too, try to escape responsibilities. But even though we are on the run, we are never far from the eye of God. In fact, we are *never* out of the sight of God and when his time comes he arranges an opportunity to confront us. If like Moses we turn aside, we'll step on to holy ground It has nothing to do with where the land is located. It has everything to do with our attitude and our willingness to listen to, learn from, and *do* what the Loving Father tells us to do.

**Acts 7:35-43 Section Five -Track One: What Stephen actually said.**

And then there is the fifth point in Stephens witness to the Sanhedrin. "This Moses whom they refused, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' God sent as both ruler and deliverer by the hand of the angel that appeared to him in the bush. He led them out . . ." (Acts 7:35,36a). This refers to Moses in his *leadership years*. To validate his leadership Moses "performed wonders and signs" (Acts 7:36b). He even prophesied "God will raise up for (Israel) a prophet" (Acts

7:37), and that God will do this the same way he raised up Moses: from *among* his *own* people following his *rejection* by his *own* people! Later on Moses received the law. Where? On Mount Sinai. Where was Sinai? Far from Jerusalem in what we might call “pagan” terrain.

Things got tough in the wilderness. The people got restless and rebel against Moses (Acts 7:39-43). They wanted to go back to Egypt. Deliverance was offered them, but when they began to understand what was involved in walking by faith, rather than by sight, “They made idols and they rejoiced in the works of *their* hands” (Acts 7:41). “But *God . . .*” (Acts 7:42). Here is another reference to *his* activity. “But *God* turned and gave them over” to worship the lifeless deities they had made. As I have often said from this pulpit: choose your God carefully because you will become like the God you worship. That’s what happened to the Israelites. They became small and powerless like the gods they made.

**Acts 7:35-43 Section Five -Track Two: What Stephen said meant to those who heard him say it.**

The charge had been that Stephen attacked the law. With this reference to Moses he argued that the law didn’t *exist* until Sinai. Sinai was a mountainous territory far from Jerusalem. The point being: God was not only universal, he was ingenious. He gave his children exactly what they needed, exactly when they needed it.

Stephen went on to make it clear that despite their protestations of loyalty to God and the law, the children of God repeatedly and flagrantly rejected *both* God *and* the law. The point he drove home was that *God got along fine without the law for a long, long time and he could get along without the law again.*

Even more to the point: *God also got along fine without people who wouldn’t do it his way!* Actually, and sadly, he ultimately gave them over to their *own* gods and one whole generation of them died in the wilderness. The implications of that reminder had the Sanhedrin fuming with rage.

**Acts 7:35-43 Section Five - Track Three: What Stephen said means to you and me.**

Relating that to *our* human condition, are we not genius’ at making foxhole promises? Are we not good at making classy commitments to Christ designed to get us through a given jam. But when the jam is over are we not quick to revert to our former pattern of casual commitments as the cost of a real relationship with Christ becomes clear? We rebel and return to the *gods* of our own making, while all along God is trying to teach us these are *idols* and we will become weak and lifeless and impotent like the so-called *gods* we make.

So Jesus comes along and says, “He who saves his life will lose it, but he who loses his life for my sake will save it” (Mark 8:35). God offers deliverance in Christ, but the cost of discipleship is high and we aren’t willing to pay it. We turn back to our former priorities, values and way of doing things. And, God lets us go! He gives us over to our idols and their limp, lifeless, inability to help us. We wind up lonely and forlorn, for God can get along quite nicely without us when we are unwilling to do things his way.

**Acts 7:44-50 Section Six -Track One: What Stephen actually said**

At this point in his argument Stephen addressed the charge that he had demeaned the temple. He

did so by reminding the Sanhedrin *where* God met with his people before there was a temple. “Our fathers had the *tent* of witness in the wilderness, even as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen” (7:44). God had made his presence known to his people in a *tent* designed and built according to *God’s* specifications. Where was it? *In the wilderness!* Far from Jerusalem. Remember that, because it, too, is key.

Verses 45 and 46 explain that when the Israelites entered the promised land this *tent* went with them. It was portable and was set up in various places. That should have been a clue to the Jews regarding the nature of their God. He can not be cabined in a human structure. He is fluid and active everywhere, at all times. The inference is that a *tent* was good enough for God up to and through the time of David. When David wanted to build a temple God said, No, I have a higher purpose for you, David. I’m going to build a *house*, or family, out of you. It will be the *house* of David. Out of that *house* will come my Son. Out of my Son will come a body called my *church* and the church will be my way of communicating my love to a world with which I long to be reconciled.

So Solomon built the temple, Stephen says ( (Acts 7: 47). It was even more grand than Herod’s temple, but God does not dwell in houses made with human hands. For support Stephen quotes Isaiah, one of Israel’s most respected prophets, “Heaven is my throne, and earth my footstool. What house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?” (Isaiah 66:1,2).

#### **Acts 7:44-50 Section Six -Track Two: What Stephen said meant to those who heard him say it.**

The charge had been that Stephen had attacked the temple, the place where God is. His response was a simple one. The temple didn’t even exist until Solomon. Before that there was a *tent*. Like the Lord God who designed it, it wasn’t fixed. It didn’t stay in one place. It was not an end in itself. It was a means to the end of helping them be confident of God’s presence in their midst.

His point came through loud and clear to the people who heard him make it: *God got along quite well without the temple for a long, long time and he can get along without it again.* Hearing this, the members of the Sanhedrin lost any remaining objectivity in their ability to deal justly with Stephen.

#### **Acts 7:44-50 Section Six -Track Three: What Stephen said means to you and me.**

Is it not true that, like the Israelites of old, *we* also make boxes in which we try to fit God, only to discover He is bigger than the intellectual, philosophical, theological boxes we make for him? But he never stops trying to make himself known. Praise his name, he never stops trying to make it clear that *any* place is a holy place when God and the people of God meet together there.

#### **Acts 7:51-60 Section Seven -Track One: What Stephen actually said**

We come to the seventh and last point in Stephens witness before the Sanhedrin. It is the most devastating of all. “You stiff necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the righteous one, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels

and did not keep it.”

Track one is clear: you are no better than the people who preceded you. What they did, you did. Only you finished what they started. You killed your Messiah! Notice, please, Stephen doesn't make any allowance for mitigating circumstances. Back in Acts 3:17 Peter is quoted as saying regarding the Jews participation in the crucifixion, “I know you acted in the ignorance.” Stephen doesn't bother with such niceties. He says, “You betrayed and murdered the Righteous One, (meaning their Messiah)” (Acts 7:52).

**Acts 7:51-60 Section Seven -Track Two: What Stephen said meant to those who heard him say it.**

Track two is equally clear and the Sanhedrin got it: I'm not on trial, *you* are! Had he been given a chance, I'm sure Stephen would have pled with them to receive their King and his kingdom so, as a nation, Israel might be redeemed. To their and Israel's great loss, they didn't give him that chance. “When they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him” (Acts 7:54).

**Acts 7:44-50 Section Seven -Track Three: What Stephen said means to you and me.**

Track three, what this means to us, is also clear. We have no excuse, my friend. The evidence is in. God has proved his faithfulness again and again. No more proof is required. All we need to do is take God at his word, stand firmly on his promises and we will find that the Promiser and his promises are true. As I've said, I believe that had Stephen been given a chance to invite Israel to receive Jesus individually and collectively he would have done so, and he would have done it *effectively* because the fruit of the Holy Spirit was evident in his life.

These first 7 chapters of Acts tell us about the apostles witness “in Jerusalem.” They describe *what* happened and *how*. *What* happened was the birth of the church. *How* it happened was through the anointing of Holy Spirit.

Chapter one says, “Through the Holy Spirit there was power.”

Chapter two says, “Through the Holy Spirit there were utterances.”

Chapters three and four say, “Through the Holy Spirit there was boldness.”

Chapter five says, “Through the Holy Spirit there were signs and wonders.”

Chapter six says, “Through the Holy Spirit there was wisdom.”

Chapter seven says, “Through the Holy Spirit the Spirit's fruit was seen.”

Love was there expressed in joy: Stephen's face shone.

Love was there expressed in peace: Stephen was not anxious in this dangerous situation.

Love was there expressed in patience: Stephen was not hostile toward his accusers.

Love was there expressed in kindness: Stephen's words and attitude reflect concern for *them* and their salvation.

Love was there expressed in goodness: Stephen's righteous indignation was aimed at what sin had done to God's people, not at the sinners who had committed those sins.

Love was there expressed in faithfulness. Stephen was where he ought to be, doing what he ought to do.

Love was there in the presence of meekness: Stephen's power was restrained, but even so the Sanhedrin could not cope with that kind of power.

Love was there in the presence of self-control: Every facet of Stephen's being was under the

control of the Holy Spirit. Had he been given a chance to finish, I believe he would have effectively communicated Christ as Savior and Lord to those people, but he was interrupted. Their anger curdled into rage. They intervened. They convicted him. They illegally killed him. And Acts 8:1 says, "Saul was consenting to his death." Not just placidly accepting it, but heartily agreeing to it.

In Acts 1-7 we saw The Church Established, empowered by the Holy Spirit and authenticated before the world by the baptizing quality of Spirit-filled people. In Acts 8-12, our next study, we will see The Church Scattered, as empowered by the Holy Spirit its witness is carried into "Judea and Samaria." And then . . .