

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Acts Chapter 2



Background Reading

Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8;
 Luke 3:16; John 1:33;
 Romans 5:4-5; 1 Corinthians
 12:7; Hebrews 2:4

Devotional Reading

Acts 2:29-42



Central Verse

"And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

Acts 2:4, KJV

"And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them ability."

Acts 2:4, NLT

Key Terms

Remission—The act or process of being released from the guilt or penalty of sin.

Formula—A set form of words for use in a ceremony or ritual.

Pentecost—A Christian feast on the seventh Sunday after Easter commemorating the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles.

Introduction

A gift is something given willingly to someone without charge. It is a present. The Holy Spirit is a gift, who has a specific role. The Holy Spirit is not an "it." He is a person. He is not something, but someone: He is the third person of the Godhead. "For there are three that bear record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" (1 John 5:7). There are three people in the Godhead known as the Trinity, which means three. Trinity is the foundational Christian belief that God is one being who exists in three persons. The word "Trinity" means three-in-one and it does not appear in the Bible, but the number three does.

Discussion

Believers do not worship multiple gods. They worship God, who is comprised of the Father; the Son, Jesus Christ, who is God in human form; and the Holy Spirit, who lives inside believers that have accepted Jesus, helping them to grow closer to God.

Believers need to know who the Holy Spirit is and the power that He brings to their lives on a daily basis. Believers must learn to understand Scripture, which tells them about the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. This helps them to grow as human beings who love the Holy Spirit and want to know more about His role in their lives. To be strong in the Lord and do exploits, the believer cannot disregard the gift of the Holy Spirit. Seeking this gift is a decision every committed believer must make. Seeking the gift cannot occur unless there's a desire, a hunger to serve God's people.

The believer cannot be confused about the fact that when he receives salvation, he receives God, Jesus, and the Holy Ghost. But there is another step that he must take and that is receiving the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. Every believer must come to realize that he needs the Holy Spirit if he is going to fulfill God's will in his life. He fills the believer with power, promise, and peace, and He gives fresh hope and faith to those who are weary. For He is the best gift given to the believer after he receives salvation, which gives the believer a personal relationship. But, if the believer wants intimacy with the Holy Spirit, he must completely surrender his life to Him. He must know that this gift of the Holy Spirit is available to him simply by asking for it, believing it, and receiving it. If human beings even know how to give good gifts to their families and friends, then God knows how to give better gifts to His children who ask for them.

The writer Luke tells the believer that God will give this gift to those who ask for it. Matthew tells the believer to "ask and it shall be given." (Matthew 7:7). The Holy Spirit has limitless power and wisdom, and He brings these attributes to any believer who invites Jesus Christ into his heart and allows Him to come and live in them. As human beings, we love to receive gifts, but many tend to shy away from the Holy Spirit because they don't know who He really is and what He might do. But if the believer would let Him into his heart, He will come with His power and change their life forever. This gift is for everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God; that He came and died to save sinners from their sins; and that He arose from the grave and is now seated at the right hand of His Father.

The gift of the Holy Spirit had been prophesized by the Prophet Joel in Joel 2:28-29. So, on the day of Pentecost, while the disciples were waiting in the Upper Room of the building they occupied, there came a sound from Heaven, sounding like rushing wind that filled the entire house where the disciples were sitting. Along with the sound of wind, cloven tongues that looked like fire appeared before them and sat upon each one of them and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. And they began to speak in other languages as the Spirit allowed them to.

Conclusion

This caused much amazement among the men who were there in Jerusalem, because they heard the disciples speaking in their different languages. They knew that the disciples were Galileans and couldn't speak all those different languages. The men from the different countries mocked them and said that the followers of Jesus must be drunk with wine.

This gave Peter an opportunity to address them, so as he stood up, the other disciples stood with him. Peter's message that day on Pentecost contained a pattern for the proclamation of the Gospel. He preached such a powerful word with a Holy Ghost anointing that the Jews from the different places in Judea and from around Jerusalem became convicted in their hearts. These were Jews who believed in God, but they had not been ready to accept Jesus as the Son of God. They had been told that a Messiah was coming but they didn't believe He was Jesus. They were waiting and looking for the Messiah, but because Jesus didn't come like they thought He would, they fell into the crowd that said, "crucify Him." But now after Peter had preached and made them aware of who Jesus Christ was, conviction filled their hearts, so they cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter told them that they must repent and be baptized—every one of them—in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins and then they, too, would receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Peter was there when Jesus gave the formula for baptism, so he was not given them a new formula. He was answering Jewish men who had rejected Jesus, and after hearing such a powerful anointed Word, they needed to know what to do to change things. Peter told them that they must repent. These men had to repent for the sin of rejecting Jesus Christ as the Son of God, for there is no other name given whereby men can be saved. So that these Jews could receive the gift of the Holy Spirit they had to accept Jesus

and be baptized in His name for the remission of their sins.

Questions

1. Who is the Holy Spirit?
2. How do you receive the Holy Spirit?
3. What did the men need to repent from?

Essential Thought

The gift of the Holy Ghost is free, but the believer must receive it.

The Outpouring of the Holy Ghost

Background Reading

Acts 1:1-8; Luke 12:12; 2 Timothy 1:14; Matthew 28:19; John 20:22; Romans 9:1

Devotional Reading

Acts 1:4-8

Central Verse

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Acts 1:8, KJV

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Acts 1:8, NLT

Key Terms

Holy Ghost—The third person of the Holy Trinity; Holy Spirit.
Outpouring—The act of pouring out.

Introduction

The Book of Acts was thought to be written by the disciple Luke to provide history for the early Church. It is sometimes referred to as the Acts of the Apostles, for it tells of the many things that Jesus's disciples did after He left them and went back to His Father. The Book of Acts gives the history of the early Church, how they thrived and survived under severe and trying times. It tells of a people who had to learn how to trust and depend on someone who had left them. They survived on what they had heard, seen, and shared with Jesus who was said to be a fraud.

Acts teaches the believer that when he knows Jesus, he cannot allow the opinions of others to change how he feels nor allow others to interfere with

his relationship with God; for he must remain steadfast in his belief. He must hold fast the profession of his faith. As Hebrews 10:23 instructs us, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for He is faithful that promised)."

Discussion

The first chapter of Acts records the last time Jesus was seen in a bodily form before He ascended back up to Heaven. It was similar to a home-going service of our time; it was the closure for the disciples, who had lived through a very frightening time, watching Jesus being tried and convicted and condemned to death. It was a horrifying experience to watch the man whom they looked to as their Savior being whipped, mutilated, and killed on a cruel cross. They had lived with Him and walked and talked with Him for over three years and now, in this chapter, He violently leaves them. It was a time of instruction as He prophesied to them of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The first chapter was the beginning of the Apostolic movement for the early Church. This chapter laid the foundation for the five-fold ministry to be activated after Jesus' ascension. It had been prophesied many times about the coming of the Holy Ghost. And in this chapter, Jesus emphasized the necessity of the disciples receiving the Holy Ghost. He instructed the disciples not to leave Jerusalem without receiving the baptism of the Holy Ghost. For over three years, Jesus had been with them as their teacher, guide, comforter, instructor, and leader. But since He had to return home to His Father, they would need someone with them to continue to do these things for them.

Being disciples of Jesus was a different way of living for this small group of men and women. Every believer must understand that they cannot live a committed life to Jesus Christ without guidance and help. Jesus had talked about the Holy Ghost several times to His disciples, making them aware that He was concerned about them and that He had made provision for them. He had informed them that the Holy Ghost was so wise that He would let them know when they should speak and what they should say (Luke 12:12).

Jesus always makes provision for His followers by providing protection, direction, and substance. And in this chapter, He's letting them know that He's not leaving them comfortless, for He's providing them with the power

of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is the third person in the Trinity. For there are three that bear record in Heaven – God the Father, God the Word (the Son, Jesus), and God the Holy Ghost. The Father draws the sinner; Jesus (the Word) saves the sinner; and the Holy Ghost preserves, keeps, and seals the believer. The Holy Ghost (Spirit) is a part of the three-in-one, or the Trinity. They are one but have distinct personalities and administrations. They are like three matches that each have a flame when lit, but when they are put together, a person cannot separate the flame.

Jesus wanted His disciples to know that there would be times when they would have to guard and defend the Gospel committed to them, and they would need help. They would face some dark days, and they would have to defend the Gospel against attacks and challenge the Church as they attempted to lay aside the truth. Guarding their faith must be done with the help of the Holy Spirit. Only receiving the outpouring of the Holy Ghost could ensure this help. The Holy Ghost inspires the infallible truths of Scripture and guides and defends the truths that keep believers' faith intact.

Conclusion

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus gives the Great Commission to all His followers of all generations. This commission states the goal, the responsibility, and commissioning of the Church which involves sending missionaries into every nation. Their primary task is to make disciples, and this can only be done when believers receive the power that comes through the outpouring and receiving of the Holy Ghost.

Jesus, who is the author and finisher of our faith, is the only one qualified to give the strong directives that He gives to the disciples and the Church. He is the formula for water baptism. He told the Church to "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Questions

1. What was one of the reasons the Book of Acts was written?
2. What is the main focus of the first Book of Acts?
3. How does this chapter connect with what's going on in today's society?

4. How can each believer help to fulfill Jesus' wishes concerning Acts chapter one?

Essential Thought

The gift the Father promised is the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

THE SPIRIT WORKING AMONG BELIEVERS

Background Reading

Acts 2:42-47;
1 Corinthians 11:24

Devotional Reading

Matthew 19:21-30;
Hebrews 10:24-25

Central Verse

"And all that believed were together
and had all things common."
Acts 2:44, KJV

"And all the believers met together
in one place and shared everything
they had."
Acts 2:44, NLT

Key Terms

Vertical—Going straight up or down from a level surface.

Horizontally—Relating to, directed toward, or consisting of individuals or entities of similar status or on the same level.

Miracles—An extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs; an extraordinary event taken as a sign of the supernatural power of God.

Introduction

After the twelve disciples, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the others who were in the Upper Room (about 120 people) received the baptism of the Holy Ghost, the Church began to grow. Peter had preached, and about three thousand souls were added to the Church. Not everyone was happy about this new church, so they faced opposition from many areas.

Believers can rest assured that when Jesus is with them, He is greater than the entire world that comes against them. Opposition comes to help strengthen the believer's trust and faith in God. If they don't have problems, they would never experience the wonder-working power of God in their lives. When believers make up their minds to follow Jesus, they can also

be assured that Satan is coming, for Satan comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). "It is an honor for a man to cease from strife. But every fool will be meddling" (Proverbs 20:3).

In this lesson, we will study the seven important characteristics of the Spirit-filled Church immediately after Pentecost. The believers who received Jesus as their Savior were viewed by many as outcasts. They were looked down upon by the established religions of that time.

Discussion

1. Apostles' Teaching: The early Saints were discipled and nourished in the Word. They were taught the Word by the men who had followed and lived with Jesus. They heard Jesus as He told the Scribes and other church leaders that they err not knowing the scriptures in Matthew 22:29. The early Church was centered around the Word. The Apostles knew that the Word of the Lord gives life, so they taught as Jesus did with anointing and authority. Some of the teachings that they taught later became the New Testament.

2. Fellowship: The disciples knew at that crucial time they needed to knit themselves together with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, as well as with one another. The believers must have a special love for those who are of the household of faith. They developed a personal relationship with God as well as nourished a warm, honest, open, healing, redeeming, and fellowship-based life together in Christ. Living in a community together provided safety for the believers, for they faced some very hostile people in their surrounding communities. Their being together provided strength and comfort as they faced many unbelievers in their towns. It's important for believers to have good relationships with other believers and with God.

3. Breaking of Bread: Breaking of bread speaks of intimacy among believers. The early believers came together regularly and went from house to house having fellowship, which included sitting down together, getting to know one another, and eating together. As believers, they are admonished to know them that labor among them and esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). They also came together often to observe the Lord's Supper as Jesus had commanded them to do. They were adamant about remembering what Jesus said to them at the first Communion in the Upper Room. We don't find a specific time in the Bible to have Communion in our churches, but many of the Pentecostal

churches observe this practice on first Sundays, by wearing their white dresses and suits.

4. Prayer: In the early Church, just as it was in the early Church Of God In Christ, prayer was a priority and a very integral part of the believer's life. The founder of the Church Of God In Christ, Bishop Charles Harrison Mason, spent many hours on his knees in prayer. Jesus told the believers in Luke 18:1 that "men ought to always pray and not to faint." When the Saints of God pray, the Holy Spirit is free to work among and through them. More can be accomplished through prayer than through hours of talking and other activities. Prayer and faith work together, and, as the Word says, the just shall live by faith. In the early Church, many hours were spent in all-night prayer meetings—three- and seven-day shut-ins, no water or food, just prayer, praise, preaching, singing, and the reading of the Word.

5. Miracles, Signs, and Wonders: Miracles, signs, and wonders are important aspects of the Holy Spirit at work in the lives of believers. In the presence and power of the Holy Spirit coupled with prayer, faith, and praise comes forth miracles, signs, and wonders. Miracles, signs, and wonders draw sinners into the Church, for they are blessed when they see, and seeing causes them to believe. The early churches were filled with wheelchairs, canes, and walkers, which were evidence of God's healing power.

6. Sharing Community: No man is an island and can stand alone. Human beings were made to share their lives with their communities. The early Church experienced community because they only had each other. They were rejected by the other established religions, so they learned to depend upon each other and the Holy Spirit. When they accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, they were cast out from their biological families. They were viewed as traitors and heathens. So, their comfort, their love, encouragement and help came from each other.

7. Making Disciples: After the believers received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they were empowered to witness for Jesus Christ. They were so excited about what Jesus had done for them, that they were anxious to tell others about their testimonies. The righteous influence and the witness of these believers effectively permeated the city. People were able to see changes in the disciples' lives, and it caused a stir throughout their surrounding cities.

Conclusion

Because of what God had done for the believers, they were able to say that they were not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For it was power unto

salvation, unto deliverance, to those who would listen, hear and receive. It is important that believers share their story and let others know who their God is.

The same Holy Spirit that worked in the early Church is alive today, and He works in the Body of Christ when given the chance. For this is not by man's power nor might, but by the Spirit of Almighty God. God's Church, His Kingdom cannot be built by intellect alone. The believer must be led by the Spirit, and if he accepts the leading of the Spirit, there is nothing that he won't be able to do for the building up of God's Kingdom.

Questions

1. What is the major work of the Holy Spirit among believers?
2. Why was living together as a community so important for the early believers?
3. Name two of the things that the Holy Spirit did among the believers that promoted church growth.
4. What was the purpose of miracles, signs, and wonders?
5. How can someone receive miracles, signs, and wonders?

Essential Thought

The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead will quicken your body and raise you to heights unknown.

THE HEALING POWER COMES FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT

Background Reading

Psalm 103:2-5, 107:20;
Jeremiah 17:14; Mark 16:17-18;
Acts 3:6-10

Devotional Reading

Mark 9:17-29

Central Verse

"Then Peter said, silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk."

Acts 3:6, KJV

"But Peter said, 'I don't have any silver or gold for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!'"

Acts 3:6, NLT

Key Terms

Paralyzed—Rendered incapable of movement or action.

Miracle—An extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs.

Introduction

The healing of the crippled beggar was done by the power of Christ working through His Apostles. Healing is part of the empowerment that is given to believers when they receive the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that in His name they would be able to lay their hands on the sick, and the sick would recover. The believer knows that it is the will of God for His children to be healed.

He is the one who made each one of His children and He knows how to heal them of all sickness and disease. It's His delight to heal, deliver, and

set His children free. God gives many gifts to His disciples, and healing is one of them. He gave the Holy Spirit so that the believers could continue the healing ministry after He had gone back to His Father in Heaven. So, Peter continued Jesus's healing ministry in obedience to His will. Therefore, the miracle was accomplished through faith in Jesus Christ and the gift of healing operating through Peter.

Discussion

Peter told the man that he had neither silver nor gold to give him, but what he had to give was much more valuable. Many times, believers are reluctant to move forward in the power of the Holy Spirit because of their financial status, but they must understand that it is not by power nor by might, but by the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. The believer should not be influenced by the opinions, looks, or spirits of others. He must be led by and move in the Spirit of the Holy Ghost.

Evidently, someone must have brought the crippled man and laid him at the gate daily to beg and ask for alms. We don't know how long he had been there, but the day of his healing was different. Peter and John were entering the Temple to pray at prayer time when they saw him. He had chosen a good place to be laid, because normally people who pray or go into the Temple are people whose hearts can be touched, and they are usually generous.

But this day, when the crippled man asked for a monetary gift, Peter and John had no money to give to him. They looked at him and saw that what he really needed was to be healed of his disability. So, Peter told him to look at them, and of course, being a beggar, he expected to receive money. But to his disappointment, Peter told him that they didn't have money and that they had something better than money.

God is a revealer, and He knows what a person really needs even before he can ask. It is important for believers to stay in tune with God, so if He needs to reveal something to them, they will be on the same page. Peter was full of the Holy Ghost and was attuned to God, so, when he saw the need, he was able to command the blessing in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. This was very important because there were many young men of that time named Jesus, but Peter identified the Jesus that he was talking about.

Because the Holy Spirit was operating in Peter and John, Peter was able to take the crippled man by the right hand as a point of contact and lift him

up. The right hand is the hand of favor, so when he lifted him up by the right hand, the man received strength in his feet and ankles immediately. The man leaped and stood up and walked with them into the temple, walking, leaping, and praising God. The people saw him and recognized that he was the beggar that had been lying at the gate, crippled. They were filled with wonder and amazement at what God had done for him. Miracles tend to increase the faith of unbelievers.

Some years ago, I was in a revival in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, a woman was there who had been paralyzed for eighteen years was brought to the service. I prayed for her, gave her my right hand, and told her to get up, and of course she did. Not only did she walk, but she ran around that church. Many of the people said that they had never seen a real miracle like that before. Afterwards, God gave many miracles in the service that night.

Conclusion

When a believer is filled with the precious gift of the Holy Spirit, he can pray or speak and expect the Holy Spirit to release healing for him. It is one of the privileges of allowing the Holy Spirit to live inside of him. The Lord has informed the believer that many are the afflictions of the righteous, but He delivers the believer out of them all (Psalm 34:19).

It's important that believers read God's Word. In it, He tells the believers that He is the Lord who heals them. He repeats that promise over and over again in many verses. He is the same today as He was when the crippled man was healed at the gate of the Temple and remember that He is no respecter of persons. What God has done for one, He can and will do for another.

Peter was so excited that he addressed the wonder of the people, reminding them of the greatness of the God that they served, the greatness of the God who had healed the crippled man. Let your faith make you whole.

Questions

1. Where does healing power come from?
2. Who can be healed?
3. What does God say about healing?
4. How did the crippled man get healed?

Essential Thought

If the believer has faith in the Lord, all things are possible.

PETER AND JOHN ARRESTED AND TAKEN BEFORE THE JEWISH COUNCIL

Background Reading
Acts 4:1-12

Devotional Reading
Acts 4:1-7

Central Verse

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole."

Acts 4:8-9, KJV

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, it, said unto them, 'Rulers and elders of our people, we are being questioned today because we've done a good deed for a crippled man?'"

Acts 4:8-9, NLT

Key Terms

Jewish Council—This was the highest Jewish court and legislative body in ancient Israel, particularly during the time of Jesus. It was composed of 71 members, including priests, elders, and scribes, and was responsible for interpreting and applying Jewish law, as well as handling both religious and civil matters.

Incarcerated—Confined in a jail or prison.

Enslaved—Held involuntarily and forced under threat of violence or death to work without pay for the profit of another.

Propaganda—An organized spreading of certain ideas.

Introduction

To see a man who had been a beggar, crippled, and helpless get healed should have been a time of great rejoicing. But instead, the leaders were angry and did vengeful things, like putting the two disciples in jail.

However, since Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, he became bold in his response to the rulers and the elders of Israel. He had just experienced a great move of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. The crippled man who had been brought to the gate of the Temple daily had been healed, and Peter had been able to preach to a group of sinners. Over five thousand souls had been saved and added to the Church because of it. Of course, Satan was angry. He wants as many people as he can get to die and go to Hell with him in the Last Judgement. He comes to steal, kill, and destroy.

Discussion

Peter had angered the leaders because he told them that believing in Jesus Christ and receiving the baptism of the Holy Ghost comes to those who respond to God's grace and are willing to turn from their sins and wicked ways to embrace a holy lifestyle.

So, they were brought before the Jewish Council. The Jewish Council refers to the Great Sanhedrin which consisted of 71 members, centered in Jerusalem. But this Jewish Council seemed to have been one of their lesser courts that often was made up of 23 members and 3 judges. They were not happy that Peter and John were preaching the doctrine of the man who had been crucified and was reported to have risen from the dead. For the people to witness a formerly crippled man being healed and hearing that Jesus had healed him was very troubling to the Council. It was against everything that they stood for.

Peter and John had been put in jail, which is not a nice place to be. Jail is a place of confinement for people held in lawful custody. A person in jail is a person whose freedom has been taken away. He has lost the right to make most decisions about his own life. It is a place that puts limitations on a person's life: when to eat or sleep, to go or to come is decided for him. It's a place that separates a person from his family and his friends.

After Peter and John were put in jail, they were asked by the Jewish Council, which included Anna, the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and other relatives of the high priest, by who's authority or in whose name had they healed the crippled man.

Peter responded with the name of Jesus Christ—the Nazarene, the man that they had crucified, and God had raised from the dead. Peter told them

that according to the Scripture, Jesus was the stone that the builders rejected. He had become the cornerstone, and there is no salvation for anyone, except in the name of Jesus.

The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John. They recognized that the pair was not educated as themselves, and they recognized that they were followers of Jesus. Seeing the healed man amid the crowd made them aware that they were limited in what they could do to Peter and John. So, they dismissed them from the Council chamber and talked among themselves.

They asked themselves what could be done with Peter and John. They didn't want the Gospel to spread any farther than Jerusalem, so they called them back into the Council chamber and told them never to speak or teach in the name of Jesus again.

But Peter and John informed the Council that they would rather obey God than obey them. The Council members threatened Peter and John further but knew that if they harmed the disciples, it would have caused a riot, because most of the people were praising God for the miracle of healing this man who had been crippled for more than 40 years.

Conclusion

Yes, Peter and John were put in jail, but they had confidence that God had not forgotten them. Sometimes when people are incarcerated, families and friends forget them. And there are some incarcerated people that no one goes to visit, but they need to know that Jesus never forgets them, and He never leaves them alone. Many believers are in bondage, enslaved by all kinds of struggles, addictions, oppression, and sin. They may not be in a physical jail like Peter and John, but in jail, nevertheless. Jesus came and died to set every one of them free. Not just to give them a pathway to Heaven, but to give them freedom here on Earth. They don't have to feel imprisoned spiritually, because the power of the Holy Spirit can and will break every chain. For He is a bondage-breaker and can open the doors of any prison or jail cell.

Through the Holy Spirit there is hope from rejection, hopelessness, addiction, and prison, for the God of hope will restore the heart and the life of anyone who comes to Him in repentance. God wants His children to

have confidence in His love and protection. He wants them to know that it doesn't matter how dark the circumstances are and that He can turn the most impossible situations around. Because of the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter was not afraid, nor was he timid, but instead he spoke with the boldness and confidence that the Holy Spirit provided.

Questions

1. Why were Peter and John arrested?
2. Who arrested them?
3. How did the people feel about them being arrested?
4. How did they get out of jail?
5. Who were the Jewish council? And what did they do to Peter and John?

Essential Thought

Whatever problem you can have, Jesus can get you out of it.

THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPED PETER PREACH A POWERFUL SERMON

Background Reading

Ecclesiastes 12:9; Luke 8:1-3;
9:6; Acts 8:4; 1 Corinthians
15:12-17; 2 Timothy 3:15-17

Devotional Reading

Acts 3:11-29

Central Verse

"For after that in wisdom knew not
God, it pleased God by the foolish-
ness of preaching to save them that
believe." 1 Corinthians 1:21, KJV

"Since God in his wisdom saw to
it that the world never know Him
through human wisdom, He has used
our foolish preaching to save those
who believe." 1 Corinthians 1:21, NLT

Key Terms

Intentional—Done with intention; on purpose; not accidental.

Infallible—Not capable of being wrong.

Times of Refreshing—A period when God will send blessings and renewal
to His people, particularly associated with the return of Jesus Christ and the
restoration of all things.

Introduction

It seemed that Peter had become the official spokesman for the disciples
and the band of Saints that Jesus had left. After the Pentecost experience,
when he preached and 3,000 souls were added to the Church, it seemed
that he was given the job as the leader of the Church. So, once again he
finds himself preaching to a group of interested people. This group of peo-
ple had watched the crippled man get healed and they were in awe at what

had been said by Peter. They realized there was a power greater than any
ordinary man that gave Peter the opportunity to preach and to tell them
about the man who had led them for three and a half years, Jesus Christ.
Peter's preaching that day helped men and women to find purpose, true
fulfillment, and a transformed life that could point others to Christ.

Peter and the other disciples were newly filled with the Holy Spirit, and they
were in awe of what God was doing. Every believer who has the Holy Spirit
should look for and take advantage of every opportunity that comes his way
to share the message of Jesus Christ. Knowing how the Holy Spirit experi-
ence has changed their lives, they were willing to do as Peter did and share
the powerful Word with all who were willing to hear.

Discussion

There are many people who really want to have a closer relationship with
God, but don't have a clue where to start. The believer has the power to
help them to come into a real relationship with God – a relationship that is
not so formal, not too intimidating, or ineffectual. The believer's experience
with God can help people to get to know God more intimately and experi-
ence the same power that healed the crippled man and gave him a new life.
All Scripture is given by God. His Word is intentional, exact, and infallible,
and all of His Word is profitable for every season and aspect of a person's
life. God's Word can transform anyone who reads it with an open heart and
receives it. Peter was preaching, but he did not have a printed Bible as we
have today. He had the Old Testament and the words and life of Jesus to
share with the people.

It brings great pleasure to God when believers share the message of Jesus
Christ. So, Peter told the people that God had chosen to bless them with
the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the condition of their repentance. Some
of God's people fail to recognize that "all have sinned and fall short of the
glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Many of them are not aware that all unright-
eousness is sin, and that all sin must be turned away from and repented for.
Then they must receive Jesus and embrace His teaching.

The Holy Spirit was so powerful in Peter that as he preached, he was able to
tell the people about the fundamental values and standards to which each
one of them could aspire. He was able to help them navigate a blueprint of
a disciplined life, living out faith through the power and presence of the Holy

Spirit. He let them know that what they saw were the results of the same Jesus who was crucified on the Cross, died, was buried, and rose from the dead. He had gone back to His Father in Heaven, making it possible for men to be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The people knew about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so Peter was able to show them that Jesus was a part of their lineage and that the God of their fathers had glorified His Son, Jesus Christ, whom they delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, who wanted to let Jesus go. Peter told them that they denied the Holy One and desired a murderer instead of Jesus. He told them that they killed the Prince of Life, but God raised Him up from the dead. Now they had to repent, convert, and have their sins blotted out, so that when the time of refreshing came from the presence of the Lord, they could receive salvation.

Conclusion

Peter was able to tell those listening about the Gospel of Jesus Christ during his sermon, and he made them aware of how powerful the Holy Spirit was by giving them the Word from the Old Testament. Because they knew the Old Testament and the Law, they were able to receive the Word that Peter gave them. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation to those who believe. Seeing the crippled man being healed opened their hearts and minds to receive the Word that Peter preached on that day.

When a believer has the gift of the Holy Spirit, he has the power to break down walls of resistance against salvation and to help men and women repent of their sins. Because the preacher was wise, he was able to use the right words that led to repentance and salvation.

Even before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Jesus Christ and His disciples went throughout their area preaching and showing glad tidings of the Kingdom of God. And Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and many other women ministered unto Jesus of their substance. These same women, along with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, were part of the Upper Room group, and they, too, received the baptism and the power of the Holy Ghost. For this power was poured out upon men and women alike.

Questions

1. How did Peter know what to preach to that group of people?
2. What caused people to be willing to listen to Peter?
3. How can the believer help the sinners in his life?
4. How did the Holy Spirit help Peter as he preached?

Essential Thought

He that wins souls must be wise and led by the Spirit of God; for the Father draws, the Son saves, and the Holy Spirit seals them.

The Holy Spirit is Yet at Work in Peter, John, and the Believers

Background Reading

Acts 1:25-26, Matthew 17:17
John 10:1-5, Acts 4:29-30
1 John 3:17

Devotional Reading

Acts 4:31-37

Central Verse

"And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of the God with boldness."
Acts 4:31, KJV

"After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness."

Acts 4:31, NLT

Key Terms

Overwhelming—To overcome completely; very great in amount; very strong.
Distraction—Something that distracts; an object that directs one's attention away from something else.
Possessions—Things that belong to a person.
Apostolic—Of, relating to, or conforming to the teachings of the New Testament Apostles.

Introduction

The Holy Spirit had created within the Apostles an overwhelming desire to proclaim the Gospel. He gave them determination not to allow anyone, or anything stop them from sharing the Word. Peter and John had been put in jail because of using the mighty, wonder-working power of the Holy Spirit to heal a man who had been crippled for over forty years. They had boldly

at the Jewish Council when they had heard that they had been put in jail. They were not afraid to speak the Word of God in the name of Jesus. They were not afraid that the Jewish Council had power over them. They understood the power of the Holy Spirit. They were not afraid to share the Word of God with those who were not believers.

Every believer should be so convinced that the name of the Lord is a strong name, and the righteousness of God is a strong righteousness. They should know that the Word of the Lord is alive and powerful. It is stronger than any law of man, and it is stronger than any power of man. They should be so much like Jesus that people will automatically know that they are a part of Jesus' Church.

Discussion

The two apostles had been released and went back to report to the believers what had happened at the Jewish Council. The people joined in with them with prayer and began to proclaim the Word of the Lord. They began to entreat God and asked Him for boldness that they might speak His Word, by stretching out their hand to heal, and they prayed that signs and wonders might be done by the power of the name of Jesus.

As they asked God, He heard them and granted their requests. God shook the place where they were and released the Holy Ghost again, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and spoke the Word of God with boldness. As believers speak to God, they will sometimes hear other voices that can influence their behavior, thoughts, and even the direction they should take. But the believers must not be shaken in their faith and confidence in God. Jesus said, "My sheep know my voice" (John 10:27) and "a stranger they will not follow" (John 10:5). So, when God, the devil, people, our families, religious leaders, or even our own thoughts speak, we must recognize God's voice above all else and follow Him.

The more God blessed them, the more their hearts became tender towards each other. They became concerned about the needs of their fellowmen so much that if one had possession, they all had possessions, for they had all things in common. A notable thing about the new converts is the fact that they all prayed together. Praying together brings believers closer to their purpose and allows them to experience the power of the Holy Spirit when they pray.

As the new converts were filled with the Holy Spirit, the Apostles received new fillings. They needed the new fillings to meet the continuing opposition of the Jews. The new fillings brought about the presence of God and freed the believers from the fear of others and greatly increased the courage for believers to speak out for God. For the power of the Holy Spirit brings empowerment for believers to become witnesses.

Apostolic preaching and witnessing brings about great power. With great power came the witnessing of the believers, which caused great grace to come upon them. When God is honored, trusted, and obeyed, there can be any lack. God is the source of every need that a believer can ever have. David told believers that because God is his shepherd, he shall not want (Psalms 23:1). There was a spirit of love that was being manifested in a way that was beyond comprehension. Many times, believers forget that God is love and that love is not love until love is shared. "But whoso hath this world's good, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 John 3:17).

Conclusion

God gave great power when the disciples spoke, until great conviction came upon the people regarding their personal sins, Christ's righteousness, and God's judgment. The great power included the anointing of the Spirit upon the Apostles for miraculous signs and wonders, so that believers – multitudes of both men and women – could be added to the Kingdom.

The believers were so in tune with God after they received the Holy Spirit that they were careful not to offend God in any way. When a believer falls in love with God, he wants to know all that he can find out about Him. He wants to feel Him, touch Him, talk to Him, be near Him, and obey Him. One of the brethren named Josas, of the tribe of Levite had some land, sold it, brought the money, and laid it at the Apostles' feet.

He wanted to make sure that his goods would be shared. I believe that during these perilous days that we are living in, the believers need to prepare for a great move of God. We need to live with the expectation of miracles, signs, and wonders. The believers have prayer ministries all over our countries, the United States of America and around the world. But we must not just pray but we must humble ourselves, seek God's face, turn from our selfish and wicked ways. Only then are we going to hear from Heaven, then, God will forgive our sins and heal our land.

We must return to the foundational holiness teaching, treat each other with respect, and show integrity toward one another. When we do this, we will fulfill Jesus' teaching, for other people will know that we are His disciples for we will have love one to another.

Questions

1. Why did Peter and John go to the new believers and tell them what happened at the Jewish council?
2. What was the great power about in this lesson?
3. When the believers prayed, what happened?
4. When a believer asks God for certain things, why must he be careful in his listening?
5. What are some of the distractions that can come into a believer's heart if he is not watchful?

Essential Thought

The promise of the Holy Spirit is given to every believer when they accept it.

The Holy Spirit Punishes Believers for Their Dishonesty

Background Reading

Proverbs 11:3; Ephesians 4:25; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; John 16:13; 15:26

Devotional Reading

Acts 5:1-11

Central Verse

"But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." 2 Corinthians 4:2, KJV

"We reject all shameful deeds and underhanded methods. We don't try to trick anyone or distort the Word of God. We tell the truth before God. And all who are honest know this."

2 Corinthians 4:2, NLT

Key Terms

Deceitfully—Practicing or tending to practice trickery; showing or containing deceit or fraud.

Distort—To tell in a way that is misleading; to twist out of the true meaning or proportion; to alter to give a false or unnatural picture or account.

Underhanded—Marked by secrecy, chicanery, and deception; not honest and aboveboard.

Renounced—To give up, refuse, or resign, usually by public declaration; to refuse to follow, obey, or recognize any further.

Introduction

During the infancy of the New Testament Church, God established some very important rules, regulations, and guidelines. One of them was the standard of honesty amongst the believers to God, to themselves, and to one

another. It was important that they understood their lives were not about themselves, but about God. They were taught to lie not to one another, but to always speak truth. The Holy Spirit will guide the believer into all truth, for the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth.

God hates a liar, and during Judgment, they won't tarry in His sight. Liars are already destined for Hell, where they will be cast into the Lake of Fire. A liar is a dangerous person, for he brings dissension and causes division.

Discussion

The Church was growing, the Holy Spirit was moving in a mighty way, and souls were being saved and being baptized in the Holy Ghost. God was sending miracles and there were great signs and wonders being seen daily. The believers were witnessing, having fellowship, and making sure that all believers had food, clothing, and shelter. Some of the believers who owned land were selling what they had and sharing it with the ministry.

There is always someone in the congregation whose heart is not right, who has a form of godliness, but does not have the power of God. They are just there to get in the spotlight, have their name called, or to gain glory and recognition. Such were Ananias and his wife Sapphira.

They sold a possession for a certain amount of money but kept back part of the price during offering time. Ananias went before the apostle first and laid the money at his feet. Peter asked him why he allowed Satan to fill his heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the money. He told Ananias that it was his possession and after he sold it the money belonged to him, so why would he lie about the amount that he received? God considered this lie against the Holy Ghost a serious offense. So He allowed Ananias to fall dead right where he was standing in the church. God is angry with the wicked every day (Psalm 7:11). He is a God of love, but He is also a God of wrath.

Great fear came upon all the believers who heard and saw what had happened. The young men that were there wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. He didn't receive a funeral, no memorial, just taken to the grave and dropped him in. About three hours later, Mrs. Sapphira came in not knowing what had happened to her husband. When questioned by the apostle she answered the same as her husband. Peter asked her how she

had gotten together with her husband to lie to the Holy Ghost. He told her that the same men who buried your husband are here to take you out and bury you. So, she, too, fell at the feet of the apostle and died. The same young men that took her dead, lying husband took her out and buried her next to him.

God's judgment upon Ananias was swift and caused an increase in humility, awe, and fear among the believers. Without a proper fear of the Holy God and His wrath against sin, God's people will soon return to the ungodly ways of the world. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The believers must know that God's grace is available to them, but His wrath is a reality as well.

The Church continued to grow, and God continued to add to the Church so that more souls could be saved. The Apostles were happy and content doing what Jesus had shown them: going from place to place and city to city healing the sick, delivering the homeless and the abused, and delivering those tormented by evil spirits. People came by the multitudes out of the cities surrounding Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those vexed with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Conclusion

God wants to do the same for His Church today. Jesus Christ is the same today, yesterday, and forever. God maintains the ability to bring His Kingdom alive for present-day believers just like He did for the early Church. It's time for believers to get excited and allow the Holy Spirit the freedom to work in our lives. Perhaps some believers need a new filling of the Holy Ghost. Some people are believers but have never experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which is available to every person who has repented from the sins and believed on the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins. For as many that are led by God, they are the sons of God. God wants His children to have power over the works of the flesh. Not telling the truth is a work of the flesh, and the flesh cannot obey God.

One of the most abominable sins in the Church is to deceive God's people about a person's relationship with Christ, their work, and the extent of their ministry. When a believer engages in this hypocrisy, it means that he is using Christ's shed blood to glorify himself before other people, and the Holy Spirit will not allow that without giving consequences.

Questions

1. Why is being dishonest so deadly?
2. What does the Spirit of Truth have to do with truth?
3. Why were Ananias and Sapphira punished so severely?
4. What happened to the Church when they heard about Ananias and Sapphira?
5. What should believers learn from this lesson?

Essential Thought

The wages of sin is death: some die while they live, while others die after they die.

The Apostles Are Arrested for the Second Time and Some are Beaten

Background Reading

John 16:7-11; Romans 1:16;
Acts 5:40-42

Devotional Reading

Acts 5:34-39

Central Verse

"And laid their hands on the Apostles and put them in the common prison."
Acts 5:18, KJV

"They arrested the Apostles and put them in the public jail."
Acts 5:18, NLT

Key Terms

Persecution—Punishment or harassment, usually of a severe nature on the basis of race, religion, or political opinion in one's country of origin.

Doctrine—A principle or position or the body of principles in a branch of knowledge or system of belief; something held as an established opinion.

Nought—Not anything; no thing.

Introduction

The Early Church was steadily growing, and the people came from all the cities and towns around Jerusalem. The word had spread that miracles, signs, and wonders were happening. People were bringing their sick families and friends into the streets and laying them on beds and couches so that they could be healed. No matter the sickness or ailment that the people had, they were being healed and delivered.

The high priest and the Sadducees were angry and jealous at what God was doing through the Holy Ghost, so they arrested the Apostles again.

This was the second persecution. They had arrested Peter and John after the crippled man who laid at the gate of the Temple was healed, but after threatening them, the guards had to release them.

Discussion

Anna, the high priest, along with the other leaders, were frustrated and didn't know what to do. They had arrested two of the apostles and threatened them and it only made them stronger. He didn't realize that threatening them only made them go into warfare praying, which brought another outpouring of the Holy Spirit, causing more people to believe and be healed, saved, and set free. It only gave the Apostles the opportunity to preach more powerful messages, so more souls got saved, which caused this new church to grow more.

The first persecution was responsible for over three thousand men being convicted and receiving Jesus Christ as their Savior. The Holy Spirit had the power to convict and reprove men of their sin, judgement, and unrighteousness, and that's exactly what He did, causing men to repent and turn to Jesus as their hope.

The high priest did not realize that the angel of the Lord encamped around them that feared the Lord, and he delivered them (Psalm 34:7). That night the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out of that public prison and told them to go stand in the temple and speak to the people.

The high priest and other leaders were seeing the power of the Holy Ghost on display in the lives of holy men who had received Him. These men were experiencing the abundance of grace and blessing that God has in store for every believer who lives, loves, trusts, and obeys Him.

The next morning, when the officers went to the prison and found the prison shut with no prisoners inside and only the keepers standing outside the doors, they were very disturbed. They went back to the high priest and told him, but he didn't know what to do. He didn't want to start a riot and was afraid that the people would stone them. Anna asked them, "Didn't we command you not to teach in this name? But, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine and intend to bring this man's blood down on us" (Acts 5:28).

Conclusion

Once again, Peter, the bold leader, and the others spoke up saying, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). They testified once again how God had raised up Jesus and they slew and hung Him on a tree. But God had exalted Jesus to be a Prince and a Savior, giving repentance and forgiveness of sin to Israel. The Apostles let the rulers know that they witnessed all these things and now the Holy Ghost has been given to them because of their obedience. When the high priest and his officers heard this, they took council on how to kill them.

Amongst the Council there was a man, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law. He had a good reputation among the people and stood up and said to the high priest and all the leaders, "Be careful about what you plan to do to these men" (Acts 5:35). He gave some examples of other men who had risen up and described what happened to them. He told the leaders, "If this be of God, you can't stop it; leave these men alone" (Acts 5:39). If what they were doing was of men, it would come to nought, but if it was of God, they would not be able to fight against God's will and win. They agreed, but their fleshly nature felt that they must punish these men in some manner. So, they beat them, commanded them not to speak the name of Jesus, and let them go.

The Apostles departed from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer in the name of Jesus. Every day, they went to the Temple and to every house, teaching and preaching Jesus Christ.

They were not ashamed, nor were they afraid. They knew that the Gospel was the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). They knew that fear is of the devil and that God had not given His children the Spirit of Fear, but of power, love, and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). They knew that the fearful (cowardly) would also have their part in the Lake of Fire in the Last Days (Revelation 21:8). God needs some bold soldiers in this age, men and women who are not afraid to witness to His great power or to suffer for His name.

Questions

1. How did the Apostles respond when they were arrested?
2. How did the Apostles get out of prison?
3. What did the high priest and the men of the Council do?
4. How did the Apostles answer the Council?

5. Who was the man who spoke up for the Apostles, and what did he say?
6. How did the Apostles react when they were released?

Essential Thought

When believers take care of God's business,
He will take care of their business.

The Conversion of the Ethiopian and Saul

Background Reading

Acts 8:26-31; 15:3;
James 5:19; 9:1-22

Devotional Reading

Acts 8:26-40

Central Verse

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Romans 10:9-10, KJV

"If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved." Romans 10:9-10 NLT

Key Terms

Eunuch—A castrated man placed in charge of a harem or employed as a chamberlain in a palace; a man or boy deprived of the testes or external genitals.

Pricks—Something sharp or pointed; a pointed instrument or weapon.

Introduction

We have the record of two men who were sinners and by the grace of God they were converted and turned to God in this lesson. Each one of them had to abandon something that wasn't right in their lives and embrace a life of following and living for Jesus. Many times, non-believers are called heathens because they are generally under the influence of sin and have not embraced good, holy living.

But one thing we know is that when they become converted their lives make a drastic change, and they are not the same as they were before the

conversion. "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he becomes a new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

It is important to note that the early believers were quick to take note of what Jesus, God, the Holy Spirit, or the angels had to say. In this passage the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip and gave him directions to go south like a person would do when going down to Jerusalem from Gaza, which is a desert.

Discussion

When Philip obeyed the angel, he encountered a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Queen Candace of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem to worship. The eunuch was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the Prophet, when the Spirit of the Lord directed Philip near the chariot. When Philip got near the eunuch, he asked him if he understood what he was reading. The eunuch asked Philip, "How can I, except some man guide me?" (Acts 8:31). It is important for new believers to have qualified teachers available for good, foundational teaching. "How can they hear without a preacher? And how can he preach except he be sent?" (Romans 10:14-15).

The eunuch invited Philip to come and sit with him while he read from Isaiah 57:7-8. As he read that passage, he had questions concerning it, so Philip began at that scripture and preached Jesus unto him. The Word of God is so powerful that it can break and destroy every hold that the enemy has. As the chariot rolled along, it came to a body of water, and the eunuch asked if he could be baptized, so they both went into the water and Philip baptized the eunuch. As he was baptized and came out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away and the eunuch saw him no more as he went on his way rejoicing. The Lord had moved Philip on to Azotus, passing through preaching in all the cities until he came to Cesarea.

Now we talk about Saul who consented to the death of Stephen. He held the coats of the men who partook in the stoning of this righteous man. He continued to breathe out threats and committed slaughter against the Disciples of the Lord and went unto the high priest. He received letters from Damascus to the synagogues, demanding that if he found any "of the way," whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

On the road to Damascus, Saul suddenly saw a bright light shining around him. He fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying unto him, "Saul. Saul, why persecutes thou me?" And Saul said, "Who art thou Lord? And the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecute: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts 9:4-5). Here, Saul had a personal encounter with Jesus as His risen Lord. Each person may have a different experience during their conversion, but the important thing is that they have that conversion.

Saul was trembling and astonished as he asked the Lord what He wanted him to do. The Lord told him to rise and go into the city, and there he would be told what to do. He obeyed Jesus' words to him, even though the men standing with him were speechless and heard nothing. Sometimes when God speaks, only the person that He is speaking to will hear Him, and no one else.

Saul went three days without physical sight, but he understood and obeyed God. There was a certain man in Damascus named Ananias that God had spoken to. God gave Ananias instruction to go to Straight Street and inquire in the house of a man named Judas for Saul of Tarsus, who now prays, and has seen in a vision a man named Ananias putting his hands on him, so that he might receive his sight. Ananias told God that he had heard of Saul, and he had heard about all the terrible things that he was doing to the believers. But Jesus told Ananias that Saul was a chosen vessel to bear His name to the Gentiles as well as the kings and children of Israel. He was going to show Saul great things that he would suffer for His name's sake.

Ananias obeyed God and went to the house of Judas and laid his hand on Saul, saying, "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus that appeared unto you in the way as you came, sent me that you might receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost." Immediately, the scales fell from his eyes, and he received his sight and was baptized. He got up, ate, and stayed with the believers for a few days in Damascus.

Conclusion

God takes the foolish things of this world and confounds the wise. Three days after Paul's conversion, he was filled with the Holy Ghost, and he was no longer hunting the Saints to kill and hurt them. He began to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, telling people in the Synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. The people who heard him were amazed because they knew his lifestyle, how he had persecuted them. They saw and heard the change that had been wrought in his life.

Questions

1. When a sinner embraces Jesus, what happens in their life?
2. Who was the man Phillip met sitting in his chariot?
3. What does the power of the Word of God do?
4. Why was Ananias nervous about laying hands on Saul?
5. How many days after Paul's conversion did he get filled with the Holy Ghost?

Essential Thought

Jesus wants to change you for the better, if you allow Him.

MORE PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH

Background Reading

Matthew 5:10-12, 23, John
13:20, 2 Timothy 3:12
1 Peter 3:14, Revelation 2:10

Devotional Reading

2 Corinthians 4:8, 12-16

Central Verse

"And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church at Jerusalem: and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles."

Acts 8:1, KJV

"Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed with the killing of Stephen. A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all believers except the Apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria."

Acts 8:1, NLT

Key Terms

Subversive—A systematic attempt to overthrow or undermine a government or political system by people working from within.
Atheistic—Non-belief in the existence of God or any gods; one who subscribes to or advocates atheism.
Pluralistic—A state of society in which members of diverse ethnic, racial, religious, or social groups maintain and develop their traditional culture or special interest within the confines of a common civilization.

Introduction

Stephen, one of the first seven deacons, had been stoned to death for preaching the Gospel. He was a man full of the Holy Spirit and was used mightily by the Lord. Saul was a young man who stood around and held the coats of some of the leaders who stoned Stephen. He agreed with the

...of Stephen. He agreed that the leaders and Stephen were preaching and teaching a false doctrine. Persecutors judge men strong...
...such as Saul. But they can be strong. Sometimes they thought...
...he was right. He stood in the authority and got satisfaction in being in the...
...and when he could find who were confessing and Jesus as their Lord...
...and Saul. They imprisoned and killed as many as they could. They only...
...believers were beaten, tarred and feathered, covered in mud, and...
...in whatever terrible punishment their persecutors could find to put away...
...from them.

Christian persecution is one of the most significant human rights issues happening in our time. It has been reported that over 260 million Christians are living in places where they experience high levels of persecution. There are many places where faith in Jesus Christ is forbidden. But some men and women chose to suffer affliction and live under persecution rather than defile themselves by living in sin.

Discussion

Jesus shared with His disciples that they would be persecuted for His name's sake, but it put them in a place where they would be blessed. It would have been easy for the disciples to deny Jesus Christ, but they loved Him dearly, and He said that if they loved Him, they would keep His commandments. The believer must come to the place where he can truthfully say, "I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world can offer me." The early believers accepted an entirely different way of life but clung to their salvation. They didn't know if they would live or die from day to day, but they decided to stand for Jesus and righteousness.

When people don't understand something, they rebel against it. The Church had always honored God, but when Jesus came and they were told that He was the Son of God, they wouldn't believe it. They felt that if He was God's Son, He should have come through the King's house, not to a poor family in Bethlehem, so the masses of the people thought He was an imposter. So, the Jewish and the Roman authorities persecuted Him and His disciples. Jesus' predictions of persecution were fulfilled, but they only strengthened the believers' resolve and faith.

Jesus' words prepared His followers for their trials after He left them. He told them that in this world they would have many tribulations. Still, they

could take courage, because He had overcome the world (John 16:33). The Jewish authorities frequently arrested and imprisoned the disciples for preaching the Gospel. Still, despite threats and beatings, the Apostles refused to stop. They preached boldly and told the authorities, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

After Stephen, one of the first deacons, gave a powerful testimony before the Sanhedrin and stirred up the Jewish Leaders, this testimony led to him being stoned, causing many believers to be scattered through Judea and Samaria. After Christianity spread beyond Jewish territories, the Roman authorities began to see the believers as a threat to their social and religious order.

The main reason the believers were persecuted was that they refused to worship Roman gods and the emperor. This was seen as subversive and atheistic. The Apostles also claimed that Jesus was the only way to salvation, which challenged the pluralistic religious landscape of the Roman Empire. Their moral and ethical teaching was so different from Roman culture that it caused great hostility. The Roman community did not agree with the Holiness teaching of the believers, and they were not willing to abide by it.

Saul, the young man who held the coats of the men who stoned Stephen, seemed to be the leader of the Church's intense, severe, and widespread persecution. Men and women were put in prison, beaten, and even put to death. But what was meant for harm, God turned it around and used it for good. This persecution was the start of the great missionary work of the Church. Many believers were scattered abroad and went everywhere preaching the Gospel.

Conclusion

Persecution caused several things to happen with the Church. It caused Philip to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom, and God confirmed the Word with miraculous signs and wonders. Additionally, many Samaritans received the Word of God, believed in Jesus, were healed and delivered from evil spirits, and were baptized in water. They experienced salvation, the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit, and the power of the Kingdom of God. After Peter and John came to Samaria, they prayed, and the Samaritans received the baptism of the Holy Ghost with the sign of speaking in tongues and prophesying.

The power of God was so mighty that a man who lived in the city, named Simon, who was a sorcerer, got converted. This caused great wonder in the

town. Simon got saved, was baptized, and began to work with Philip. After seeing the power of God, he wanted what Philip and the believers had, but God rejected him, because his heart was not right. He was still wicked and thought he could buy the power he saw, but Peter told him to pray that God would forgive him.

Questions

1. Why was the believer persecuted?
2. Who persecuted them?
3. How were they persecuted?
4. What good came out of the persecution?

Essential Thought

Persecutions and tribulations give hope, and hope exalts and leads to Holy Ghost power.

Peter's Ministry Flourishes Under the Holy Ghost

Background Reading

Leviticus 11:46-47; Deuteronomy 14:1-3; Psalm 103:3; Jeremiah 32:27; Acts 8:25; 9:36-43

Devotional Reading

Acts 9:32-35

Central Verse

"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons."
Acts 10:34, KJV

"Then Peter replied, 'I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism.'
Acts 10:34, NLT

Key Terms

Executioner: A person who carries out a sentence of death.
Bedridden: Forced to stay in bed, especially by illness or weakness.
Perseverance: Continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition.

Introduction

Peter was presented in the New Testament as the wise leader of the Jerusalem Church, who acted not as a judge or executioner, but as a prophet with insight like Moses. He had lived, walked, and talked close to Jesus while He was on Earth. He followed close to Jesus and observed Him in all things. He was with the 120 followers who waited in the Upper Room until the power of the Holy Ghost fell and filled each of them. Peter helped to start the early Church in Jerusalem and Judea. In his first message, over three thousand men were added to the Church; later, over five thousand souls were added. The Holy Spirit began to use him immediately to impart the Word, heal the

sick, and bring deliverance. He was a bold and fearless leader, unafraid to stand up against the establishment. He had a powerful prayer life and was unafraid to go to jail for the Gospel's sake.

Discussion

As the Saints were scattered, Peter traveled through several regions. He came to the Saints who lived at Lydda. There, he found a man named Aeneas who had been bedridden for eight years because he was paralyzed. Jesus had told His disciples to heal the sick, so Peter told the man to arise and make up his bed, and he arose immediately. And those who dwell at Lydda and Saron saw him and turned to the Lord.

Many believers forget that God has given each person a measure of faith, and this faith, when exercised, will work for them. Many times, after Jesus prayed for people, He told them their faith had made them whole.

Usually, when people see others getting healed, it inspires them and helps them to release their faith and believe in the Holy Spirit so that they may be saved, healed, delivered, or set free. A few miles away from Lydda was a town called Joppa, where a certain disciple named Tabitha, also called Dorcas, was full of good works, alms, and deeds. When the disciples heard that Peter was at Lydda, they sent two men there to bring him in a hurry. Tabitha was sick and had died. When Peter arrived, they took him to the Upper Room where she was, and all the people were weeping. They had many garments she had made for them while she was alive.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Peter went to the Upper Room, knelt, prayed, turned to Tabitha's body, spoke her name, and told her to rise. She opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. Peter gave her his hand and lifted her. He then called the Saints and presented her to them. Again, when the people heard of her being restored to life, many believed in the Lord.

God is the God of all flesh, and nothing is too hard for Him. Jesus Christ is the same today, yesterday, and forever, and He is no respecter of persons. He forgives all your iniquities and heals all your diseases. The Holy Spirit just needs a willing vessel to use, as He used Peter. As the Holy Spirit worked through Peter to heal and raise the dead, He worked through Tabitha with deeds of kindness and love as she shared with the Saints in Joppa.

While God was using Peter in Joppa, God was visiting another man who was a Centurion of the Italian Band. This other man was a devout man who, along with his household, feared Him, and he gave to the poor and prayed daily. An angel said unto him, "Cornelius..." He looked at the angel and prayed, "What is it, Lord?" The angel answered, "Thy prayers and alms come up for a memorial before God" (Acts 10:4). God wants you to know that He considers prayers to be a sacrifice, reminding Him of your perseverance in calling upon Him in faith and devotion.

The angel told him that God wanted him to send two of his men to Joppa to get Peter, who was staying at the home of Simon the Tanner, whose house was by the seaside. Peter would tell him what to do. Cornelius sent two of his men to Joppa to get Peter.

Conclusion

Meanwhile, Peter went to the house the next day to pray at the sixth hour. Peter prayed regularly every day. This reminds believers that there cannot be much Holy Ghost power without fervent prayer. Peter became very hungry, but while the food was being prepared, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens open.

In the trance, he saw a certain vessel descending onto him, as it was a great sheet knit at the four corners and let down to the earth. On this sheet were all kinds of beasts of the world—wild beasts, creeping things, and fowls of the air. God told him, "Rise, Peter: kill and eat" (Acts 10:13). But Peter said, "Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything common or unclean." And the voice spoke to him, saying, "What God hath cleaned, that call not unclean, nor uncommon." It was done three times and then raised back up.

Peter was trying to decide whether he had this vision and to figure out what it meant. Meanwhile, Cornelius had sent three men looking for him. Peter asked who they were and what their business was. They told him that Cornelius had sent them for him because he wanted to talk with him. Some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him to Cornelius' house.

Cornelius told him that he had been fasting for four days and nights, and God had spoken to him. He followed God's instructions to send for him and let him talk to him. Peter preached Jesus and the Resurrection to him. While Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit fell on them, and they were all filled with

the Holy Ghost and spoke in tongues. This was the first outpouring upon the Gentiles.

Questions

1. Why do you think that Peter was picked out to be the leader?
2. What were some of his attributes of leadership?
3. In what ways did he compare to Moses?
4. Why was the man in Lydda healed?
5. Who can be healed?

Essential Thought

All souls belong to God, so He sends the Holy Spirit to each and every person who believes in Him.

The Gentiles Receive the Holy Ghost

Background Reading

Matthew 10:5-6; Acts 2:38-39;
Romans 11:25; Galatians 3:5-
18; Ephesians 1:13;
1 John 4:13

Devotional Reading

Matthew 15:21-28

Central Verse

"When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

Acts 11:18, KJV

"When the others heard this, they stopped objecting and began praising God. They said, 'We can see that God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of repenting their sins and receiving eternal life.'"

Acts 11:18, NLT

Key Terms

Gentile—A person who is not Jewish.

Grecians—Being or resembling that of ancient Greece or the ancient Greeks.

Bond—Bound in slavery.

Introduction

This lesson is filled with excitement because the Holy Ghost is moving in the lives of the Gentiles in the Book of Acts. Jesus had told His disciples not to go to the Gentiles when He first sent them out. He told them to go to the lost sheep of the House of Israel (Matthew 10:6). He came to His own, and His own received Him not. But as many received Him, He gave them power to become God's sons, even to those who believe in His name (John 1:11-12).

Jesus Christ came to the earth for a purpose. His coming was a decision He freely made and was approved by His Father and the Holy Spirit. He traveled around the land of Israel and made God's Kingdom known. He also explained why He came several times. He was not secretive about His coming. In Matthew 17, He said that He did not come to destroy the Law or the prophets, but to fulfill them.

Discussion

The Gentiles were every nationality who were not of the Jewish nation. God designated the descendants of Abraham, the Israelites, as His chosen people. He made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants and revealed His commandments to them, which they were to live by. Any nations outside of Israel were considered Gentiles, but many times in the Old Testament, there are accounts of Gentiles becoming Jewish converts and followers of God.

The Prophet Hosea prophesied, "And I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are not My people!' And they will say, 'You are my God'" (Hosea 2:23). Daniel and Isaiah also prophesied that the Gentiles would have the opportunity to become a part of Spiritual Israel.

In the New Testament, Jesus told the disciples that He had placed them as a light for the Gentiles, for Jesus became a bridge between the Gentiles and God. Jesus knew that God doesn't want any of His children to perish, but He wants all of them to see the truth. So, the early believers who helped build the New Testament Church intentionally brought the Gospel to all nations. Typically, Gentiles make up several different nations, but their common denominator is the fact that they don't follow the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. They don't receive the teaching of the Gospel and do not conform to godly living. They believe in and worship many gods.

The Bible names many Gentiles who left their families, gods, and styles of living to embrace righteousness and the Truth. In the New Testament, we have the account of Cornelius, the Roman centurion who converted to Christianity, along with his family. He was very devout and gave himself to righteous living. He had been fasting and praying for several days when God spoke to him in a vision. God told him to send for Peter and let him talk to him. He sent three men to Simon the Tanner's house in Joppa to get him to come. Peter also had a vision of how God dealt with him concerning

his differences. Peter was received into this Gentile's home and preached Jesus Christ. Cornelius and his household received water baptism and were baptized in the Holy Ghost with speaking in tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. He and his family were among the first of the Gentile converts. Because of the Gospel, the Gentiles have become heirs together with Israel. God's grace makes it possible for Jews and Gentiles to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit with the gift of speaking in tongues. For if a believer belongs to Christ, then he is the seed of Abraham and an heir according to the promises that God made to Abraham and his seed.

Conclusion

As the disciples scattered, they spread out to several cities as far as Antioch. Some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, so these men began to witness to the Greeks. The hand of the Lord was upon them, and many people started to believe. The Church continued to grow, and many Gentiles were being added to it. When this good news returned to Jerusalem, the leaders sent Barnabas to Antioch. Barnabas, a good man full of the Holy Ghost and faith, began to exhort and encourage the people, and more people were saved and added to the Church.

After Barnabas had finished, he left and went to Tarsus to look for Paul. When he found Paul, he brought him back to Antioch, and they stayed a year teaching, preaching, training, and helping the Church to grow. It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians. Then other Prophets came to Antioch from Jerusalem. One named Agabus came, and he prophesied through the Spirit that there would be a great dearth throughout the world during the time of Claudius Cesar. Because of the prophecy, the disciples could send relief to the disciples who lived in Judea by Barnabas and Saul.

It is the will of God for all the brethren to help one another. From one blood God made all nations. Whether we're Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female, we are all our Heavenly Father's children, and He loves us.

Questions

1. What was different about the Gentiles receiving the Holy Ghost?
2. Who are the Gentiles?
3. What do they have to do to receive Jesus, God, and the Holy Ghost?

4. Who was one of the prophets who prophesied about the Gentiles in the Old Testament?

Essential Thought

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,
so that all who believe in Him can be free.