

WHITE MEMORIAL

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

WMPC – Men’s Bible Study

Acts

Lesson 2

Read Acts 3 - 5

3 Questions:

Q1: Right out of the gate in chapter 3 Peter performs a healing reminiscent of the healing power of Jesus. How is Peter able to do this? What does this suggest about our ability to minister to, and maybe even heal, the sick? What is the open ‘secret’ to Peter’s ability, and does it refer back to, or cause a memory of any of the events Acts 2?

Q2: You don’t have to read very long in the gospels to discover that Jesus runs into trouble with the priests, scribes and authorities of his day. In life, established voices are often threatened by new ones. The dynamic tension between new ideas and old ones is the currency of the marketplace of ideas. So it should come as no surprise that Peter, John and disciples have run afoul of those same authorities who hounded Jesus. As you read Peter’s sermon in Acts 4 what do you make of it? Is he trying to win friends with this sermon? Is it a truth bomb - and if you have ever delivered a truth bomb, how was it received? Bonus question: do you know the biblical reference of Acts 4:11? Do you know how common it was used in the New Testament?

Q3: Chapter 5 is unforgettable. Read verses 5:1 - 11. How is your personal stewardship? How many of your possessions do you share? How do you feel about Peter - Peter of chapter 3 who heals, chapter 4 who preaches, and now in chapter 5 oversees the death of two people? Why is Peter so angry? Why do you think God’s judgement, seemingly executed through Peter, is so harsh here? Does this text make you nervous?

3 Insights:

I1: On Chapter 3, William Willimon writes:

“The significance of unleashed saving power continues to be an issue for faithful interpretation. There were plenty of people in Luke’s day who were willing to blame the crippled man’s condition on his sin or on the sin of his parents. In our own day the conventional explanation for such physical infirmity lies more along the lines of certain biological or physiological causes. In the eyes of the faithful community, both the heartache and the healing of the world’s misery are read differently. Joel had promised ‘signs on the earth beneath’ (Acts 2:19), and when asked about the authenticity of his own mission, Jesus responded by citing the evidence that ‘the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them’ (Luke 7:22). Either the community is able to point to signs of healing power at work in the world because of what has happened in Christ or the community is without evidence for its claims. The healing power is unleashed ‘in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth’ (3:6), as the name of Jesus is the direct link between the living and active Lord in heaven and his community on earth.” (Willimon, *Acts*, 1988, JKP page 45)

I2: N.T. Wright calls his bible study chapter on chapter 4, “Clash of Loyalties.” Loyalty is an attractive and effusive concept. Sometimes we inherit our loyalties. Sometimes we choose them. Sometimes they choose us. We can claim one loyalty and secretly remain loyal to something else. We can change loyalties, like political parties, or sports teams for years and then find ourselves drawn back into earlier

loyalties from younger years or even childhood as we age. Does the same work for loyalty to Jesus? Peter knows that Jesus has been crucified and that he might be crucified as well. Yet his loyalty remains unshaken. Can the same be said of us - would we exhibit our loyalty in this same way?

N.T. Wright says, "The opposition are there, and God knows about them. We are here, and we need to be faithful, to continue to speak of Jesus boldly and confidently. And here is the power of God, which is not in our possession but which, because of Jesus, will continue to be at work to set up signposts pointing to the new thing which is happening through him."

(Wright, Acts: 24 Studies for Individuals and Groups, 2010, IVP Connect, page 30)

I3: Ananias and Sapphira. Once you have read the story, it is unforgettable. It strikes us that this moment sent waves through the church. Christopher's New Testament professor once told the class that there was a special place in heaven for any pastors who preached Acts 5 on Stewardship Sunday. Christopher did this once, back at Howard Memorial in Tarboro. Stewardship was flat that year. Go figure. That is not the real point of this text in Acts 5. The point: the community rule has been violated by deception. Judgment will be executed. But the Spirit, not the people will execute the judgment here. No stoning; no crucifixion. No death by the hands of a fellow man, as was the standard of Old Testament judgment to death. Willie Jennings has an amazing perspective, one worth sharing:

"At this moment of full divinity identified, God the Holy Spirit is giving discernment of deception and bringing judgments on unfaithful actions. But God then turns the hands of Israel away from ancient killing gesture. There will be no stoning in the community of Christ. Only the Holy Spirit may draw back the breath of life. A line has been drawn that the followers of Jesus may not cross over. We are the people of resurrection, not death."

(Jennings, Acts, 2017, WJKP page 53)

2 Links to further study:

L1: Here is link to James Howell's preaching blog for Acts 4: 32-35, where the church of Ananias and Sapphira is described. In it he says that their church doesn't look much like our church at all. James is the pastor of Myers Park United Methodist in Charlotte.

<http://jameshowellsweeklypreachingnotions.blogspot.com/search?q=Acts+4>

L2: Our guess is that most of us don't use Pinterest. It is a web site - an aggregator of images and resources. Lots of Christian Educators use it to share their ideas to teach Bible stories and the like. Never in a thousand years did we think there would be an aggregated list of lessons on Ananias and Sapphira. But there is one. Amazing!

<https://www.pinterest.com/jennyj8/ananas-sapphira/>