

WHY DO WE HAVE THE BOOK OF ACTS?
Introductory Message: Acts 1:1, 2

Intro: The only way to answer a question like this is by reading and re-reading the book itself.

There is not just one answer to this question; there are many answers -- but some are obviously more important than others.

The book of Acts is important because it gives us not only the only history of the early Church that we have in the Bible, but it is a divinely inspired history! All other Church history which has been written (except for the fragmentary references we have in other books of the NT) must be judged in the light of what we have here (i.e., the written records which deal with this early period).

It is in these chapters that we learn about the beginning of the Church. We learn here about the work of the Church. We have in these chapters some examples of the preaching that was done by the early Church. We see the opposition that the Church faced -- its victories, and its defeats. We see that the difficulties of the Church were internal as well as external. We see very clearly that work of the Lord did not stop with the death, the resurrection, or even the ascension of Christ -- that it not only continued, but that it grew and expanded until it spread through the whole Roman Empire -- even to Rome itself!

The book of Acts is a book with valuable instruction, great encouragement -- a book that will give us the vision that we need for these days in which we live. When Calvin dedicated his commentary on the book of Acts to "The Lord Nicolas Radziwill, Duke of Olika . . . of Lithuania" in the year 1560, he wrote the following words:

So often as we see things tossed to and fro, and, as it were, turned topsy-turvy in the world, there can no more fit and sure prop be found to establish and stay our weak consciences, than when as setting before our eyes the kingdom of Christ, as it doth now appear, we consider what hath been the nature and method, the estate and condition, of the same from the beginning (p. xvii).

So, while it is very true that we find some things in the book of Acts that did not continue even to the conclusion of that book with reference to the works of God, yet this book will help us as much as any other in our generation to make sure that we are following in the steps of those who laid the foundation of the work in which we are engaged in this present day.

But, to simply the answer to our question, Why Do We Have The Book Of Acts?, let me take the factors which the Spirit of God

has mentioned in just the first two verses of the book. (Read.)

I want to call your attention to five things -- two are in verse 1; three are in verse 2. They have to do with:

- 1) Theophilus.
- 2) Jesus.
- 3) The commandments.
- 4) The Holy Spirit.
- 5) The apostles.

What can we learn from these that will help us to understand, not only the book of Acts, but also the work of the Lord today? Let us see.

First of all,

I. THEOPHILUS. (Read verse 1.)

What was, "The former treatise"?

Most of you know that it was (and is) the Gospel according to Luke. Although the first five books of the NT are actually anonymous as far as the text is concerned, there never has been any serious question to the claim that Luke wrote both the Gospel which bears his name, and the book of Acts.

One thing is certain: Whoever wrote the third Gospel also wrote Acts -- and both books, perhaps the longest in the NT, were written to just one man: Theophilus!

For the moment we do not need to be concerned about who Theophilus was, but it is very instructive that the Spirit of God would address two books of Scripture covering the life of Christ and the history of the early Church to just one man!

How could the Spirit of God have possibly emphasized in any greater way the importance of instructing every believer in the Gospel of God's grace and in the work of God -- especially when we never hear of Theophilus again after Acts 1:1?

Obviously Theophilus must have used it all, but how -- the Word of God does not tell us. But we are left with the indelible impression that the instruction of every believer in the Word of God is extremely important to the Lord.

If we are overlooking this as far as we are concerned, we obviously are grieving the Lord.

II. JESUS. (Read verses 1, 2a, concentrating on the word, "began.")

The word "began" clearly indicates that what "began" in the Gospel continues in the book of Acts. And it continues even though "Jesus" is in heaven!

So all of the controversy about the name of this book is settled in the very first verse of the book. Acts is the continuation of Luke, and both of them have to do with the works and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ!

The first 12 chapters of the book have to do mainly with the ministry of Peter, and the last 16 chapters have to do mainly with the ministry of Paul. And much is said in the book of Acts about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit Himself sets the record straight here in the beginning when He causes us to see that the Apostles, the early believers, even the Holy Spirit, were all involved in what "Jesus" was doing -- that the work is His, and all others were entering into that work!!!

The same applies right down to the present day. Is that what you understand about the work of the Lord -- that it is the Lord's work, and that you and I are simply entering in to what He is doing, and has been doing, from even before the foundation of the world.

The plan for world evangelization was given by "Jesus." The message was given by "Jesus." The wisdom and power and blessing are all given by "Jesus." And we will only be effective as we recognize this and enter into what He is doing. The work is His. It is His will that must be done. It is His glory that we must seek. It is His message that we must proclaim. Anything else is doomed to failure.

Let each of us ask the Lord to teach us more and more about this, and the effect that it is to have upon our work.

III. THE COMMANDMENTS.

Some of these commandments had to do especially with those Apostles (e.g., the command to tarry until the Holy Spirit was given to them). But other parts, as to their mission and their message, are still binding upon every member of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the reason that they are called "commandments." They are "commandments." No child of God is excluded.

How carefully we should read this book -- to see what the Apostles did, the priorities they had, the message they preached, where there confidence was, and dozens of other things! Certainly one reason they have been written down is because, if we were left to ourselves, we would begin to get away from the basic mission we have and we would begin to stray away from the basic message we have to proclaim.

Let us read these first two verses of Acts until (among other things) the word "commandments" is written upon our hearts, and we begin to look for those "commandments" so that we will have no question as to what they were!

And remember that they were (and are) "commandments"!

IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Here is really an amazing part of the ministry of our Lord. Read verse 2 carefully, and notice the relationship which our Lord had with the Holy Spirit while He was here on earth -- " . . . after that he (Jesus) through the Holy Spirit had given commandments unto the apostles whom he (Jesus) had chosen."

Listen: If the Holy Spirit were this vital to the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ here on earth, CAN HE BE ANYTHING LESS TO US? Is it not to our shame that so often we have attempted to do the work of the Lord without consciously depending, and expressing that dependence, upon the Holy Spirit? Do we think that our experience, or our gifts, or our training, or our knowledge, are substitutes for the Holy Spirit? Do we? Why did the Lord say what He said in verse 8 if the power and presence of the Spirit of God in the work of God were not the one, indispensable factor? Can our methods and our attempts to generate excitement be the equivalent of the power of the Holy Spirit? Have we learned that the only message the Spirit of God blesses is His own Word?

Oh, what a great need there is today for a return to the Holy Spirit with all that that involves! No true word of God has ever been done, no true awakening has ever occurred, unless the Holy Spirit was the One Who brought it all about.

You will see the need for the Holy Spirit as I come to my last point:

V. THE APOSTLES.

When you look at this history especially prepared for Theophilus, and you see the emphasis on

- Jesus,
- the commandments (the Word of God), and
- the Holy Spirit,

you come away with ideas of sufficiency and of the Lord accomplishing what He purposes to do. But the picture is different when we look at the Apostles -- different, it is true, from what they were during our Lord's ministry on earth, but still men! And then to see that it did not just happen that they were Apostles,

but that they were "the apostles whom he had chosen."

Look at their names in Acts 1:13.

And who were

- "Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnames Justus,
- "and Matthias"?

Think of what some of them had done -- their ignorance, their powerlessness, their failures. Did the Lord not know what He was getting when He called them?

Yes, He knew! And He deliberately did what He did for the reasons described, e.g., in 1 Cor. 1:29, 31 -- that no flesh would be able to glory in His presence, and, instead, that men might glory in the Lord Himself!

Concl: Thus we have the reasons for the Church's blessing, and the only reasons that the Church continues to exist today. It is our Lord Jesus Christ Who is at work by His Spirit through the Word, working through redeemed people who would never be sufficient in and of themselves for the work that He has called them to do.

This what Theophilus was to learned from the book of Acts, and this is what we are to learn. The events of the book serve to emphasize and illustrate what Luke wrote at the very beginning.

It makes no difference how weak the Lord's servants may be, if they realize that the Lord is the One Who does the work, that He honors the obedience of His people (preaching His Word, and doing His will), and that the Holy Spirit is the One Who empowers us to be both faithful and diligent. Under these conditions, and these alone, will we see the blessing of God.

TWO EXTREMELY IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Scripture Reading: Selected passages from the Book of Acts:
Acts 1:1-8; 2:29-47; 8:1-4.

Intro: We believe that the Lord is leading us to establish a new church. This means that we believe that in establishing this church, we are involved in a work that the Lord is doing. If this is true (and we believe that it is), then it is important to know

- 1) What we are doing,
and
- 2) Why.

Let me take up this second point first by asking the question,

I. WHY ARE WE ESTABLISHING A NEW CHURCH IN THE PORTLAND AREA?

It is important for us to understand this not just so we can answer outsiders who ask us, but so we will have a clear idea of the reason for our existence as a church. After all, there are hundreds of churches in the Portland area. Most of you have driven many miles to come here this morning. We all have churches closer to our homes than this place is. Why have we come here? AND, if we are right in saying that this is what the Lord is doing, why is He doing it?

Our answer to this question is dependent to a great extent upon our knowledge of the Word of God and the revelation that God has given us there of the nature and purpose and work of the Church. I am going to deal with that more in connection with the second question I have for you this morning. But, just now, let us look at what has taken place in the professing Church today.

Look at the preaching that is being done in churches throughout our country -- even where people profess to believe that the Bible is the Word of God. Note how we are doing everything we can to make our messages pleasing to men. Even in the preaching of the Gospel you can see that the Church has toned down its preaching against sin and its call for "all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30). We hear practically nothing about the righteousness of God, and that a day of judgment is coming. Instead we find in many places, too many, all of the methods employed by the world to get people to make some kind of a decision for Christ so that they can be happier, or so they will be able to get what they want, or so they can become what they have always wanted to be. The ways of the world in every area have infiltrated the Church -- in the Church's music, in the Church's finances, in our attempt to be unoffensive with our messages, in the lack of holiness among professing Christians, so that the

trouble that Christians have had in earlier periods of Church history is trouble that we know nothing about because the world looks upon the Church as a friend! We have forgotten that James once wrote in the Scriptures,

"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" (James 4:4a).

What has happened in the twentieth century Church? The emphasis has become so man-centered that it seems like a man is teaching heresy if he mentions the sovereignty of God. Man has taken over the Lord's work. We have been made to believe that God owes us whatever blessings He might have for us, and then that He has to plead and coax and wait until we make up our minds that we are ready for Him to do for us what He has been hoping that He could do. We know practically nothing of the greatness of God, of His holiness, of His wrath. Our views of His love are so distorted that they bear little resemblance to the marvelous revelation that God has given in His Word.

The Church of the Twentieth Century is in deep trouble -- and yet it seems that very few recognize that things are drastically wrong. We have our great evangelistic crusades with hundreds, sometimes thousands of professions of faith, but thirty days later you look in vain to find hardly any of them. Churches remain the same after spending hours of work and giving thousands of dollars. How different this is from the spiritual awakenings of the past! What is wrong?

This is what is wrong: It is popular today for the ministry of the Church to be man-centered, but the blessing of God will not be restored until it once again becomes GOD-centered! We need once again to realize our dependence upon God, our unworthiness of God and of even the least of His blessings. We need to see that without Christ we can do nothing! We need to realize that men will always despise and reject the Word of God because their hearts are held in bondage to their sin and to Satan, and that only God can work in us to will and to do of His good pleasure. We need to seek first of all, not the approval of men, but the glory of God! AND, UNLESS I AM MISINTERPRETING WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN OUR DAY, I BELIEVE THAT THE LORD IS RAISING UP WORKS JUST LIKE OURS FOR THE PURPOSE OF CALLING HIS PEOPLE BACK TO HIMSELF, BACK TO THE DESIRE FOR HIS GLORY, AND BACK TO THE RECOGNITION OF HIS PURPOSES WHICH HE HAS ESTABLISHED FROM ALL ETERNITY! We are a part of what God is doing. The Church needs revival! And it seems that God is in the process of bringing all of this about. How it should humble us! How it should drive us to our knees! How it should turn us to the Lord and to His Word so that we might learn how it is that God works, that we might work with Him!

Thus, we can believe that God is raising up a new work -- this Church -- and we believe that He has led us to call it the TRINITY BIBLE CHURCH . . .

- TRINITY, because our mission is to proclaim the glory of the Triune God -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- BIBLE, because it is in the Word of God that we have the truth that God wants us to know, to believe to live, and to proclaim. We have a charge to proclaim the whole counsel of God, the great doctrines of God matchless, distinguishing grace.
- CHURCH, because we are called out members of Christ's Body. We look to Him as our Head, not to any man, or group of men. Not to any organization. We are His people, just sinners saved by grace, banded together by the Holy Spirit, set apart from the world, and yet commissioned to carry the Gospel to all the world.

I believe with all of my heart that God is working among His people today to bring us back to recognize His authority and to do His will. This is what I am interested in because God has been working in my heart to bring me to this place. And I ask you in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit to join me in our God-given mission in this crucial hour of the world's history.

A new church? The only way we can justify our existence is by realizing that God is raising us up as a part of what He is doing to bring the Church back to the place in the purpose of God where she belongs!

But now let us ask, HOW ARE WE GOING TO DO IT? Or to state the question in the light of the fact that we are beginning the study of the Book of Acts this morning,

II. WHY ARE WE GOING TO STUDY THE BOOK OF ACTS?

Before I give you some answers from the Book of Acts, let me give you a quotation from John Calvin. In his day the trouble was with the Catholic church; in our day it is in our evangelical churches where supposedly we stand for the Word of God, but where we seem to be more concerned about numerical growth than we are about the proclamation of the truth. Listen to what Calvin wrote in his dedicatory section to his commentary on Acts:

So often as we see things tossed to and fro, and, as it were, turned topsy-turvy in the world, there can no more fit and sure prop be found to establish and stay our weak consciences, than when as setting before our eyes the kingdom of Christ, as it doth now appear, we consider what hath been the estate and condition

of the same from the beginning.

And then he goes on to say what he has in mind when he speaks of the kingdom of Christ. Listen!

When we speak of the kingdom of Christ, we must respect two things; the doctrine of the gospel, whereby Christ doth gather unto himself a church, and whereby he governeth the same, being gathered together; secondly, the society of the godly, who being coupled together by the sincere faith of the gospel, are truly accounted the people of God. (Cf. p. xvii.)

Do you see what his two main concerns are? First the Gospel, and then the Church. And Calvin goes on to say that if you want to know the Gospel that the early Church preached and what the early Church was and did, then we must read this whole Book of Acts! No book on Church History is as reliable as this Book! It is true in every detail to what actually happened in those early days. If we did not have this Book, we would not know how the Church began, nor how the Apostles preached, nor what the difficulties were which they had to face, nor the blessing that God was pleased to give them, nor many other things that God wants us to know and which we should desire to know as we follow the Lord in establishing this work to His praise and to His glory!

But, let me be a little more specific! Let me point out some of the things which are coming in the Book of Acts which we need to pay particular attention to in getting the message of the Book.

A. Their dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

This was such a strong point in the early Church that many commentators feel that this Book should really be called, The Acts of the Holy Spirit.

Note what the Lord said in Acts 1:4, 5, and then in verse 8 in connection with the Holy Spirit. See what the Holy Spirit did in Acts 2, and how Peter even quoted from Joel's prophecy about the work of the Spirit, and how Peter even promised "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (in v. 38) to those who would "repent, and be baptized." And this was only the beginning.

Take the references to the Holy Spirit out of this Book and you completely change its character. The Holy Spirit was leading; the Apostles were following. The Holy Spirit was doing the work; the Apostles and the early Christians were the instruments that He was using. Today how different it is. The Church either gets taken up in all kinds of fanaticism, or we take the lead hoping that the Holy Spirit will go along with us in what we want to do.

Oh, how we need the Book of Acts to show us the place that the Spirit of God had in the early Church so we will know the place that He should have, that He must have, that He will have today!

But let us look at another thing.

B. The preaching that was done in the early Church.

Acts 2 is a good example, but there are many other messages recorded in the Book.

Note the content of their preaching -- especially how they spoke of the Lord Jesus Christ, of His death and His resurrection; how they related Him and His work to some of the great prophecies of the Old Testament, showing that this had all been in accordance with God's plan and God's purpose for the salvation of men; how Christ and only Christ was proclaimed as the sinner's only hope of forgiveness. ~~Doctrine was extremely important to the early Church. The Apostles were not entertainers; they were teachers!~~ Much more could be said. Acts is the greatest book ever written to teach us how to preach and how to witness to the world.

Be sure to note also the boldness that they manifested. There is a great deal of encouragement for us in learning about the solid, strong, and yet compassionate preaching of the Apostles.

But let me point out another thing:

C. The results that the early Church saw.

And let me point this out in two ways:

1. The numbers of people who were saved.
2. Who some of the people were who were saved.

With regard to the first, note that there were less people in the upper room in Jerusalem than there are here this morning, and yet when Peter finished preaching in Acts 2 there were 3,000 people who were saved. See Acts 2:41. And to complicate things look at the last verse (47) of Acts 2, and see what the Lord kept doing every day!

What would we do if the Lord chose to work in a similar way with us? Did you ever think of that?

But with regard to the second point, i.e., who were saved, what is more encouraging than to read about what

happened to Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9? The greatest enemy of the early Church, by his own confession -- the chief of sinners, was saved, and he became the Apostle of Jesus Christ to the Gentile world! Surely there is proof in this that there is nothing that is impossible with God!

I must hasten on, but let me mention just briefly . . .

D. The opposition which the early Church faced.

Think of Stephen, and think of James, and remember that many died for the sake of the Gospel. Think of those who were driven from their homes. Think of Paul who was stoned.

Some of the Church's trouble came from within.

Nowhere does the Book of Acts even remotely suggest that those who serve the Lord are going to have an easy time! We can always be joyful, and fruitful, but not necessarily comfortable!

Are we ready for this?

And this is one of the reasons that you find also that in the early Church there was . . .

E. A strong emphasis on prayer.

This is one point where the Church is very weak today. We are so sure of our methods and so confident of what our money will enable us to do that we do not pray like the early Church did. Consequently we lack the power which the early Church had. There is much about prayer in the Book of Acts.

Finally, we learn from the Book of Acts that

F. The Church was seeing the unfolding of God's divinely ordained plan.

Please turn to Acts 13:48. The Lord Jesus spoke of this. Paul and Peter and John in the NT all have written about this. It is OT truth as well as NT truth. And yet we hardly ever hear of it today -- a truth which is so extremely important because of the glory that it gives to God and the confidence it gives to the Church that our labor will not be in vain. (Read.)

Turn also to Acts 18:9, 10 -- the Lord's encouragement to Paul in Corinth when things were getting rough.

(Read.) This is our assurance also concerning our ministry throughout the Portland area -- God has a people who have not yet been reached, eternally chosen for salvation, who must be reached, who must hear the Gospel, and who will most certainly be saved! The Lord knows who they are, and where they are. We do not. That is why we go to everyone. But we go, not with our confidence in ourselves, nor with the idea that we are the ones who set the pattern for the Lord's work, but that we are doing His will, and that we will see the unfolding of His marvelous work in the proclamation of the Gospel.

Concl: We will be talking about all of these things more in detail as we go through the Book, but I am seeking with the blessing of God to whet your appetite this morning. Pray that your heart will be open to what we have in this Book. Pray that we will learn from the Apostles and the early Church, and then follow in their footsteps that we might see in our day a mighty moving of the Spirit of God, not necessarily as they saw it, but in the way the Lord chooses to deal with us!

One final word: When we see the kind of people the Lord used in the days described in the Book of Acts, you see that there is hope that He can and will use even people like we are -- not because that is what He has to do, but because He has chosen to work through those who are no better than we are so that all of glory and praise can be His!

IN PREPARATION FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 1:1-14

Intro: It would be difficult to find a passage which has more references to vitally important truth than this passage has!

For example, notice what it has to say about our Lord:

- 1) In the use of the Name, "Jesus," which is found 3 times in the first 14 verses (vv. 1, 11, 14), we have clear evidence of the humanity of our Lord.
- 2) In the words, "to do," in v. 1 we have a reference to His works.
- 3) In the same verse Luke writes about His teaching. And we could add to that all of the references to our Lord's teaching in this passage.
- 4) V. 3 speaks of "his passion," which points to the sufferings and death of our Lord.
- 5) In v. 3 also we read that "he shewed himself alive," which not only refers to His resurrection, a unique resurrection in the sense that He could never die again, but it also is used as evidence throughout the remainder of the NT of our Lord's Deity.
- 6) The ascension of Christ is prominent in vv. 2, 10, 11. Right here, as the Apostles watched, the Lord Jesus "was taken up," or, as it is stated in v. 10, "he went up."
- 7) Finally, with reference to our Lord, v. 11 gives us the promise of His return.

We might add to all of this the clear implication in v. 1 that ^{Since} the Gospel of Luke is the record of "all that Jesus began both to do and teach," this Book of Acts is the record of all that He continued to do through His people by the power of the Holy Spirit even though He was in heaven!

But this is not all!

Notice that all Three Persons of the Godhead are mentioned in this passage: The Son, The Father, The Holy Spirit. And we even have the appearance of angels in vv. 10, 11. Cf. Luke 24:23. It is because of this emphasis in Scripture that we call ourselves the Trinity Bible Church. We worship the Triune God, we seek the glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

But even this is not all. Look at the emphasis in this passage on the people of God. You have here the nucleus of the early Church. A question is raised about Israel. And you have 11 Apostles mentioned in v. 13.

And yet there is still more.

V. 8 not only gives us one way in which we can outline the Book of Acts, showing how the Gospel spread in these early days, but

this is one verse which gives us the Biblical basis for missions! We can see in Acts:

- 1) The ministry in Jerusalem in the first 7 chapters.
- 2) The ministry in Judea and Samaria in chapters 8-12.
- 3) The rest of the Book tells of the ministry through the Roman Empire.

But we must not overlook the emphasis upon the sovereignty of the Members of the Godhead.

- 1) The Father had given a promise.
- 2) The Lord Jesus is here telling the disciples what to do in relation to that promise. He had also "chosen" them.
- 3) The teaching of the Lord clearly indicates that it would be meaningless and fruitless for the disciples to try to do their work until the power of the Holy Spirit was upon them.

You get the strong impression from this passage that we are on the threshold in this passage of seeing what the Godhead is going to do!

Finally (although there may be more), you have the two main things that were prominent in the life and ministry of the Apostles and the early Church: the Word of God, and prayer.

So we have here a very rich and important passage.

But now let me take up some of the details of this passage

- 1) as they relate to the Book of Acts itself, and the ministry of the early Church, and also
- 2) as they relate to us and our ministry today.

There are several things which are tremendously important.

- I. THE MINISTRY ABOUT TO BE DESCRIBED (and which continues to the present time) IS THE CONTINUING MINISTRY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. See v. 1.

What dignity this gives to our work! This sets it apart from all other work that is being done in the world. This gives us assurance that the work will actually be accomplished!

The last verse of Mark's Gospel tells us what was going on. After Christ ascended, Mark tells us that this is what happened:

"And they (the eleven) went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen."

The word, "began," in v. 1 of our text not only points to the beginning of this work in the earthly ministry of Christ, but also to the fact that our Lord did works and engaged in teaching that was different from anything that had gone on before.

How this ought to encourage us in our work! Actually it is not our work; it is the Lord's. And He will stand with us. He will strengthen us, and guide us. He works in us and through us to His own glory and to the accomplishment of His will. Cf. Matt. 28:20; Phil. 2:12, 13.

But look with me at another thing in this passage:

II. THE THINGS WHICH THE LORD SPOKE ABOUT.

I am thinking of two statements here -- one in v. 2, and the second in v. 3.

- 1) In v. 2, "after that he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen." What "commandments" did He give them?
- 2) In v. 3, "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." What does this mean?

The two statements surely have to be related.

Let us take Peter's own explanation given later in Acts 10:39-43 when he was preaching to Gentiles in the home of Cornelius. (Read.)

So from Peter we read that those "commandments" and those "things pertaining to the kingdom of God" had to do with the message they were to preach, the Gospel, and where it was to be preached -- to all men, even to Gentiles!

There was probably no more significant time of teaching in the whole earthly ministry of Christ than that which He did in these "forty days"! How carefully He must have explained the Gospel -- all of the great themes of Scripture. It is here that we find the Lord molding and shaping the preaching of the Apostles which we have the record of from Acts 2 on. How wonderful it would have been to have heard the Lord at this time!

But I must go on. The third thing I want you to see is

III. THE REVELATION WHICH THE LORD MADE OF HIMSELF.

See it in v. 3: "To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days."

We know some of the things that He did.

It was not a single appearance just to one person, but it was many appearances to many people (see 1 Cor. 15) over a period of 40 days! CONSEQUENTLY THERE WAS ONE CERTAIN SOUND THAT IS HEARD THROUGHOUT THE MESSAGES OF THE BOOK OF ACTS. IT IS THIS: THE BODILY RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST. Cf., e.g., Acts 2:22-24 ff.

And may I remind you that it was while Peter was declaring the death and resurrection of Christ that, in Acts 10, "the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word"! Cf. Acts 10:44. AND THIS IS THE VERY SAME WAY THAT THE BLESSING OF GOD WILL COME UPON US TODAY -- WHEN WE PREACH THE GOSPEL WHICH THE APOSTLES PREACHED AND BOLDLY DECLARE THAT CHRIST IS RAISED FROM THE DEAD!

But look now with me at a fourth point:

IV. THE INSTRUCTION THAT THE APOSTLES WERE GIVEN TO "WAIT."

See v. 4.

The waiting of the Apostles had to do with special circumstances, i.e., the advent of the Holy Spirit, but there are truths here which also have their application to us.

- A. It suggests that the Lord has His own time for working.
- B. It shows how indispensable the work of the Holy Spirit is.
- C. From many passages of Scripture we are taught that there are times when waiting is the will of God, not working.

In fact, waiting usually precedes all effective work.
Cf. Isa. 40:31.

We now possess the Holy Spirit, but is the power of the Spirit upon us? Are we grieving the Holy Spirit by the sin that is our lives, or are we walking in the Spirit? Do we know what it is to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

Listen: Even our preaching of the Word will be fruitless unless the Spirit of God is upon us with power, blessing our witness to those who hear the Gospel from us! Let us confess and forsake our sins, asking God to search us and to cleanse us that we might be fit vessels for His use.

But we also have in this passage, at the very outset of the Apostles' ministry

V. A REBUKE.

See vv. 6, 7.

How important it is for us to learn that we are limited to the Word of God, and that it is sinful for us to try to go beyond that Word! The Lord did not say that their question was wrong, nor that He would not restore the Kingdom to

Israel. He simply said, "It is not for you to know . . ."

We are responsible to know what the Lord has revealed (and we have our hands full with that), but we must not seek to know what God has not revealed. The more we do, says one commentator, the more we tend to neglect the work that God has given us to do, and, we might add, to neglect and distort the Word of God also.

Beware of men who seek to be overly specific about the prophecies of Scripture!

Last of all (although there are many other things that could be said about this passage), note

VI. THE EMPHASIS ON PRAYER. See v. 14.

What were they praying about?

The same thing that the Lord had prayed about in John 14:16, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever."

This was "the promise of the Father"!

But do we pray for the things that He has promised? Certainly we do! In fact, this is the only way we can know that we are praying as we should. Cf. 1 John 5:14, 15. God's will is revealed in His Word, and this is the reason that the Word of God and prayer have to be kept together.

As someone has said (and I don't know who it was), "The promise is the parent of prayer."

One of the greatest lessons of the Book of Acts is that there is no blessing without real prayer, much prayer. God gives the promise, and we claim it by prayer -- waiting and praying!

Concl: Thus, we have here in Acts 1 not only the basic truths for the blessing we read about in this Book of Acts, but we have the basic truths for us to know and to act upon if we are to see God's blessing today. God is at work. He works through His people. But His people must proclaim the true Gospel of His grace. They must be Spirit-filled and Spirit-empowered. They must be a praying people. They must be people united by the Spirit of God, concerned about only one thing: the glory of God, and the glory of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. If these things are as they should be, the world will be evangelized, and we will have a part in seeing the Lord claim the people that He has chosen and whom He is calling to Himself. May God grant that we will see this in the days to come.

THE NEED FOR ANOTHER WITNESS

or

A REPLACEMENT FOR JUDAS

Acts 1:15-26

Intro: We have before us in this passage the first ^{recorded} matter of business which was taken care of after the ascension of the Lord: the choice of one to replace Judas.

- 1) It was after much prayer.
- 2) It followed 40 days of instruction from the Lord who in all probability told them to do this. Cf. 1:2, 3.

Why the Lord did not appoint a replacement before He ascended, we do not know. We can see that this was their first experience in making a great decision based upon two things: (1) the Lord's instruction (as we would follow the Word); (2) an answer to their prayer in which they expected to see His sovereign, providential leading as they made their decision.

And so vv. 21, 22 give us the theme of this particular passage. (Read.)

Do not miss the word, "must," in v. 22 - spoken of as an absolute necessity.

Why?

Obviously it stems from the two passages which Peter quoted in v. 20: Psa. 69:25 and Psalm 109:8 -- especially the latter verse. This "must" ex-

pressed a necessity which was thrust upon them by divine appointment. (See Thayer, p. 126). They had no choice about this if they were to be obedient to the Lord!

A witness was needed to complete the Twelve. Their job was witnessing -- witnessing of Christ's resurrection with all the vitally related events: His death, His appearances, His ascension -- all historical events and facts.

Note this emphasis in the preaching of the early Church - as they related it to the OT, and showed its significance to Christ,

to the Gospel,

to the lives of believers,

to their future hope.

The span of time indicated in v. 22a shows the extent of the witnessing which was done, always centered in the resurrection.

How important it is for us to get the message straight and to realize what it means to preach the Gospel, what it means to bear witness of Christ!

I accept the action done in this passage as having the full approval and blessing of God. In 1 Cor. 15 we see that Paul, by his own testimony, was not one of the 12!

But now we come to a most important

question which, although not specifically stated in Scripture, must have been upon the hearts of most of these early believers. It is this: WHY DID JUDAS BETRAY THE LORD JESUS -- he, an Apostle, one who had been chosen by the Lord, and who had been with the Lord throughout our Lord's entire ministry on earth? How could he do such a thing?

In answering this question, let us note what Peter did and learn a very important lesson:

I. THE PRIMARY EMPHASIS ON SCRIPTURE (Acts 1:15-20).

We will never understand things like this unless we begin with God, our sovereign God (because He has to be sovereign in events like this, as well as in everything else, or He must not be God -- God, Deity, indicates sovereignty). AND TO BEGIN WITH GOD, TO LOOK AT THINGS FROM GOD'S SIDE, MEANS TO BEGIN WITH THE WORD (which is exactly what Peter does).

note how Peter exalts the Word in v. 16 -- and he gives an answer which few (if any) are prepared initially to receive.

Note again the word, "must."

I know it is not popular even

among Christians to preach this. This is the main reason I am not preaching where I used to be -- some could not and would not accept the plain, clear teaching of Scripture because it did not agree with their ideas of God! But I must say it. Peter said it. David by the Holy Spirit predicted it. It is Scripture. It has to be true. Our Lord was not deceived about Judas. He knew he was a demon, completely unregenerate. Cf. John 13:18; 6:70.

This was all a part of the divine plan. The Scriptures could not be broken. Note Acts 1:20 -- the reasons behind the "must" of Acts 1:16.

And will you notice that Peter says that that prophecy was personal? It was not that just somebody would do it, but that Judas would do it! BY HIS BETRAYAL OF JESUS CHRIST JUDAS WAS FULFILLING SCRIPTURE.

We have trouble with that, don't we? But we have trouble because we assume (although it is never taught in Scripture) that it is the will of God to save everyone! Let me say that, if that were the will of God, everyone would be saved! Have you been overlooking some Scriptures? Cf. Rom 9:22. We like vv. 23, 24, but reject v. 22. See also 1 Pet 2:8. And then look at Jude 4.

We obviously cannot explain it all,

but we must recognize the truth of
God's Word whether we like it or not!
See Acts 2:23.

But there is a ~~other~~ side to this.
It is

II. JUDAS' RESPONSIBILITY

Along side of DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY
in Scripture is the Biblical doctrine
of HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY.

How could this be clearer than
in the case of Judas?

note, first of all,

A. His privileges.

Very, very few have had the
privileges granted to Judas -
perhaps no one else!

Two things are stated (v. 17):

1. "He was numbered with us" --

as one of the 12. He was not
only with the Lord, but also
the constant companion of the
other Apostles during the time
mentioned in vv. 21, 22.

2. "He ... had obtained part of this
ministry" -- which means:

a. He preached, and had the
knowledge to do so. He was not
a stranger to the Word of God.

b. He must have baptized.

c. He performed miracles.

And he was just as responsible as
anyone else to believe in Christ.

His knowledge and his position made him even more responsible. His damnation is even greater. He had heard the Lord say, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48 m).

But what do we find?

B. His choices.

1. He was a thief. Cf. John 12:6. This is where the money came from which purchased the field mentioned in Acts 1:18.
2. Of his own depraved will he became "guide to them that took Jesus" -- and he did it for money! He follows in the line of Gehazi and Achan. Cf. 1 Sim. 6:10.
3. Not to repent and to believe, but to take his own life, and thus he himself sealed his own doom. Cf. Acts 1:18.

Read also Matt. 27:3-5.

And so notice:

C. The divine verdict

His actions are called:

1. "The reward of iniquity" (v. 18).
2. "Transgression" (v. 25).

and what a memorial he left. See v. 19.

Judas was fully responsible before God (as all of us are) and will justly suffer eternally for his sins.

What is the message for us?

Let me ask all of you this morning, esp. those ^{of you} who profess salvation - Do you know that you are saved? Do you have the witness of the Spirit? Are the evidences of salvation in your life? Do you love the Word and seek to obey it? "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" (2 Cor 13:5). Make sure!

If you do not believe, let me say that it is not by chance, or an accident that you are here. God has brought you to hear about Judas, so that you could be warned to flee from what Judas is now experiencing, and so you could believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. God is sovereign, but you are responsible. I plead with you to believe in Christ, and you will be saved.

The last point:

III. THE DECISION -- AND HOW IT WAS MADE.

Four things are important:

A. They were responding to Psa 109:8. It was God's will for Judas to be replaced.

We can't go wrong when we obey

B. ^{the Word} They chose qualified men.

C. They prayed -- they wanted the choice to be the Lords. See vv.

24, 25.

D. They cast their lots.

How they did this, we do not

know, but we do have Prov. 16:33,
"The lot is cast into the lap,
but the whole disposing thereof
is of the Lord."

Somehow, when we act on the Word,
when we pray, wanting
God's will,
He will not let us make
a mistake.

Concl: A most solemn passage. Do
not close your heart to it.
A solemn warning at the very
beginning of Church history -- and
a great encouragement. If the events
in the life of our Lord were under
the sovereign direction of God, what
peace it should bring us to know
that the Lord is doing the same for
us -- even for me in preaching a
message like this!

THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH
Acts 2:1-13

Intro: If we were to make a list of the most important chapters of the Bible, Acts 2 would have to be on that list. The reason is this: Here God is doing something which had never been done before, a work ordained from all eternity, and, like so many of the works of God, a work that would endure for all eternity!

What was that work? It was the beginning of the Church, the body of Christ.

Now, not all of the Lord's people believe that the Church began here. Some believe that it began in the OT, as far back as Abraham. Others believe that it began later -- when Peter went for the first time to the Gentiles, or even when Paul began his ministry as the Apostle to the Gentiles. But I want to show you why I believe it began here.

Let me be as clear as I possibly can.

When I say that the Church began here, I do not mean that the Gospel of the grace of God began here. I do not mean for a moment that Abraham was saved in a different way. There is only one way of salvation, and there never will be but one way. OT salvation is identical with NT salvation; it is always through Christ, always by faith. Let us be clear on that!

But it is obvious as we come to Acts 2 that God is doing a new thing. And this new thing has to do with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, a work which is not even mentioned in this chapter. It is mentioned in Acts 1:5, and it is mentioned in all four of the Gospels: Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33. It is mentioned again in Acts 11:16 where Peter relates it to what happened to the Gentiles as he was preaching to them in the house of Cornelius, linking it with what happened to the Jews in Acts 2. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is never mentioned in the OT, and there is never any indication that this work of the Holy Spirit was done before Acts 2. That is one reason we need to note carefully what our Lord said in Acts 1:5,

"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence."

And I do not know of any commentator, regardless of what he believes about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, who denies that this baptism took place in Acts 2, on that day of Pentecost -- and I might add: It is the first instance that we have of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in all of Scripture.

Why is this so important?

Let us think for just a moment about

I. THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

I want to point out three things about it.

- A. There can be no Church without the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Cf. 1 Cor. 12:13 where Paul explains to us the reason for the baptism of the Spirit. Therefore, we cannot say that the Church, the body of Christ, existed in the OT, or even in the Gospels during the life of Christ, unless we can show that people in those times were baptized by the Spirit. We cannot produced in Scripture a single instance where people were baptized with the Holy Spirit prior to Acts 2. Thus, this has to be the place where the Church began.

A second point about the baptism of the Holy Spirit:

- B. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not the same as the filling of the Holy Spirit.

This is where our Pentecostal friends go wrong.

As far back as Bezaleel and Aholiab, the men who directed in the building of the Tabernacle, the people of God were filled with the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit. And we are commanded even today to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The believers on the Day of Pentecost were filled with the Holy Spirit. See Acts 2:4. The filling of the Spirit has to do with our experience and with our ministry. It can be repeated. But the baptism of the Spirit is a once-for-all work in the case of every child of God since this day of Pentecost in Acts 2 and has to do, not with our experience, but with our position in the body of Christ.

And this leads to the last point that I want to make, the reason why we do not read of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 even though it is evident from Acts 1:5 that it took place in Acts 2 for the first time in all of God's dealings with men.

- C. The work of the baptism of the Spirit is an inner, sovereign work of the Spirit which we know about, not because we know when it happened, but because we are taught that it happened by Scripture.

Is this not true of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit? Is this not true of being sealed with the Holy Spirit? Is it not even true of the regenerating work of the Spirit in many instances? We know that these works have taken place in our lives because they are taught in Scripture as being the portion of every child of God at this time.

And so this is why you do not have it spoken of as an experience in Acts 2. It is not the same as the filling, and we can say that because of the teaching about these two works in the NT.

That is all I will say about the unique character of the Church now, but let me suggest that you read Ephesians, chapter 3, to see that the Church was something God had planned on from all eternity, but that it was not in existence until the Spirit of God began to baptize believers.

I have been discussing the unseen work that was done on that day; now I want to spend the rest of the time talking about the seen work, i.e., the work that is described in our text -- the work that could be seen.

II. THE MANNER IN WHICH THE CHURCH BEGAN.

Every part of our passage is filled with special significance in connection with this new work which the Lord was doing.

Note first of all:

A. The circumstances (Acts 2:1).

Two things need to be noticed.

1. The time: the day of Pentecost.

This immediately ties this event with that very important feast under the Law when, 50 days after the Feast of Firstfruits there was an holy convocation with appropriate sacrifices to celebrate the completion of their harvest.

Thus, not only does this NT Pentecost help us to understand the spiritual significance of the OT Pentecost, but the OT Pentecost helps us to understand what God was beginning to do here. It introduces a spiritual harvest -- a harvest which was even greater than anything that took place during the ministry of our Lord!

2. The relationship of the believers to each other: "They were all with one accord in one place."

Note especially the words, "with one accord." This was the result of what the Lord did in Acts 1. It was the work of God. It was an answer to the Lord's prayer in John 17. And it explains a major reason as to why such a great work was done in Jerusalem on that particular day of Pentecost!

The work of that day will never be repeated, but the blessing certainly can be whenever the Lord's people are brought together in the same harmony and spiritual oneness.

But now let us look at

- B. The miraculous events which took place.

Notice:

- 1) The wind.
- 2) The tongues of fire which were distributed to everyone of the believers.
- 3) The languages which were spoken.

All of these help us to understand the work of the Holy Spirit -- all of which had been on display even before this time.

Link the wind with what our Lord said about the Spirit's work in regeneration in John 3:8.

Think of the fire in connection with what John the Baptist said in Matt. 3:12 -- the "unquenchable fire."

And then note the spectacular way, the temporary way, in which the Holy Spirit introduced a work here by which untaught Galileans were suddenly able to speak languages which they had never spoken before, and which, in all likelihood, they did not even understand then! Why was this done?

- 1) To show that this was of God.
- 2) To get the Gospel out to the people at the Feast in the shortest time possible.

How could the Lord have indicated in any better way the interest that the Spirit of God has in the proclamation of the truth? Note the expressions -- in v. 4, "as the Spirit gave them utterance"; in v. 11, "the wonderful works of God."

- C. The significance attached to the people who were there (Acts 2:5-11).

They were predominantly Jews, "devout men" (v. 5), meaning that they were religious (or they would not have been there) -- but they were not saved Jews!

There were also some Gentiles there. Cf. "strangers of Rome" and "proselytes" mentioned in v. 10.

But note particularly that they had come from all over the Gentile world.

What do these details indicate as to the work that God was doing -- really the work that He was beginning? They indicate that this harvest was going to include both Jews and Gentiles. It would become increasingly apparent that the Church would include both -- and that, while Gentiles had been saved prior to this time, never before in the history of God's dealings with men had the door been opened to the Gentiles as it was being opened then!

Contrast this with what the Lord had said to His disciples in Matt. 10:5, 6,

"Go not into the way of the Gentiles,
and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Those restrictions were now being changed. These Jews were not only to be saved (many of them), but eventually they would carry the Gospel back to the Gentiles who were living in the countries from which they had come.

But there is one more thing to notice:

- D. The response.

As always, it was twofold:

- 1) Some were interested. See v. 12. (By the way -- notice the limited use of the word, "all.")
- 2) Some were ready to discount the whole thing because they felt that they had an explanation for it. See v. 13.

Concl: Thus we have the foundation laid for what is to follow. We will learn more about "the wonderful works of God" just referred to briefly in v. 11 when we get to Peter's message next week. But, as I close, let me make three or four quick observations from the passage.

- 1) Be sure to notice that this whole thing is the work of God, not an idea that the Apostles had. The sound came "from heaven"! The Holy Spirit was at work. And He chose to work at this particular time, thus revealing a phase of God's work never revealed before, while at the same time continuing the work of salvation which had its roots in the OT.

Here is added evidence of the sovereignty of God -- that He knows what He is doing, and He is doing it!

- 2) Will you also be sure to see that salvation is something more than merely being "devout," or religious? And, in this connection, will you be sure to see that some of these "devout" men (and women) rejected what they heard of the Word of God?

What is your response to the Gospel? Do you reject it? Do you explain it away? Are you sure that you are really saved? If there is any doubt, turn to the Lord this morning. There is no other hope but in Christ.

- 3) We have very strong evidence in this passage that we, too, must be busy in witnessing to the Gospel here at home as well as spreading the Word of salvation to all men everywhere.

God has ordained men for salvation, but they must hear. We do not know who they are, but that is why we preach to everybody, trusting the Spirit of God to regenerate (as mysterious as the blowing of the wind), and then to add to the Church those whom He is pleased to save.

- 4) What is important to our witness in addition to giving a clear message? It is that we are "with one accord" in our relationship with each other. Oh, how we need to guard ourselves against the divisions and the criticisms and the other sins that grieve the Spirit of God!

The Church will never have another beginning, but the spiritual condition of the Church in its beginning and the impact that it had upon the hearts of men are traits which not only can, but they must continue until the Lord calls us home, or until He comes! Let us pray that His blessing will be upon us.

LIGHT FROM THE PROPHECY OF JOEL
or
PETER'S SERMON AT PENTECOST -- PART I
Acts 2:14-21

— Intro: Once the Holy Spirit was given, preaching became a prominent feature in the ministry of the early Church.

In the first part of chapter 2 we have seen how Spirit of God enabled these early Christians to speak in tongues, i.e., foreign languages, and that their subject was "the wonderful works of God." See v. 11. J. A. Alexander says in his commentary on Acts (p. 54) that this is an expression which is "constantly applied in the Old Testament to the divine attributes and acts." E.g., Psa. 71:19,

"Thy righteousness also, O God, is very high, who hast done great things: O God, who is like unto thee!"

So we know that they preached, that they preached in foreign languages, and that their message was of God and His works.

But, as we come to our text for this morning, we have our first example of apostolic preaching!

— The first thing that should impress us is the preacher -- what a change! Remember for just a moment his cowardly denial of Christ, after he had made such confident statements about his dependability. But remember also what the Lord had said even before Peter denied Him:

"Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee (i.e., that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God"), but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Cf. Matt. 16:17, 18.

What an encouragement this ought to be to each one of us! You have the same thing illustrated in the life of Moses, and in the life of David. The Lord's purposes for His people do not change; our failures only show how much work He must do in us before we become useful instruments.

— As a result of the Lord's work in Peter's heart, and as a result of the Spirit's work, we see his great boldness, his fearlessness, as seen, e.g., in Acts 2:23. This was the beginning of a ministry which would eventually cost Peter his life, but a glorious ministry, a ministry of

power and great blessing under which thousands were added to the Church! What a testimony to the power of God!

But let us take just a brief glance at Peter's entire message -- a message which he did not have special time to prepare, but which had been in preparation for many weeks previously. This is not an excuse for us to be negligent in our study, but an evidence of how our preaching is the outflow of our lives and of our hearts, as E. M. Bounds has said, not just the performance of an hour.

To whom is he speaking?

That is very clear from vv. 14, 22, and 36. He is speaking to the people of Israel who were there in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost.

Can we detect any division in his message -- what we would call an outline?

Yes! See how he breaks up the message by renewed references to his hearers: vv. 14, 22, 29. So it seems that we have three divisions:

- 1) In the first (vv. 14-21) we see Peter clarifying from the Old Testament exactly what was taking place.
- 2) In the second part of his message (vv. 22-28) we see how he relates this to the Lord Jesus Christ -- His works, His death, and His resurrection.
- 3) In the final part (vv. 29-36) Peter elaborates on the glorification of Christ, and that this is proof of our Lord's Deity and of His Messiahship.

Peter's message is not just the relating of certain facts about Christ, or of disjointed remarks that really have nothing to do with each other, but the message shows very careful thought, unanswerable wisdom, a message that is actually an example of expository preaching in which we see Peter's exegesis of three OT passages and their relationship to our Lord. Peter is correcting false impressions, and presenting arguments from Scripture to prove what was actually taking place. It is a masterpiece of preaching, and is an illustration of the kind of preaching we should be doing today. This is obviously the kind of a message which God blesses.

But, having seen the divisions, what can we detect as to the outstanding characteristics of his message. And this will give us some additional lessons in preaching. I am speaking now about content and emphasis. How does Peter's message compare with the kind of preaching that has become popular in our day?

Let us see.

Let me point out 6 things:

- 1) Peter placed great emphasis on the Word of God.
His message is actually an exposition of three passages -- one in each of the three parts of his message: Joel 2:28-32; Psa. 16:8-11; Psa. 110:1.
- 2) He gave much emphasis to the Spirit of God -- particularly in the first part.
- 3) He makes much of God in his message. See vv. 17, 22, 23, 24, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36.
- 4) Christ is the theme of his message -- His incarnation, His life on earth, His works, His death, His resurrection, His glorification at the Father's right hand, His present ministry.
- 5) Related to the above -- we note a special emphasis on the death and resurrection of Christ.
- 6) Finally, we note that Peter's objective in preaching has to do with salvation. See v. 21. This is also the thought behind Peter's statement in v. 36. See his words, too, in vv. 38-40.

Compare this with what we get from our pulpits today.

In the most recent issue of Kindred Spirit, a magazine which is published by my alma mater, Dallas Seminary, the book that is given special emphasis has the title, Feeling Good About Your Feelings! How would Peter react to that kind of a book? What about Dr. Chafer?

There are many who say today that you cannot preach the Gospel unless you are able to say two things:

- 1) God loves you.
- 2) Christ died for you.

Will you please notice that Peter did not say either of these? And yet 3,000 people were saved! We have some things to learn about Gospel preaching, don't we? What we need to do is to get back to the Word of God to find out what true Biblical, Gospel preaching is. If we preach what they preached, perhaps we would begin to see blessing like they saw it -- Bible-centered, God-centered, Christ-centered, Holy Spirit-centered, salvation-centered preaching!

But let us look now in the time that remains at the first part of Peter's message.

But before we do, let us read the passage he was using: Joel 2:28-32. Please turn to the OT passage. (Read.)

Let me point out one thing which I trust will be helpful. It is this: The prophecy of Joel makes one thing clear -- that we do not have a complete fulfillment of this prophecy on the Day of Pentecost as Peter is speaking. And I believe that an examination of Peter's use of it will

indicate that he did not believe that that Day was all there was to it. Rather, what he was saying was that

- I. "THE LAST DAYS" WILL BE CHARACTERIZED BY TWO THINGS:
- 1) THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
 - 2) PROPHESYING.

You find about as many different interpretations of this passage as it is possible to imagine. Some say that this marked the end of the old dispensation. Some say that it characterized the beginning of the new dispensation. Some say that this was all that there was to it. Others point out that there were some things spoken of by Joel that were not fulfilled here.

Let me explain how I understand this Scripture, as Joel wrote it, and as Peter uses it.

Peter is talking about the whole of this present time -- which he calls, "the last days." It extends, as he speaks of it here to "that great and notable day of the Lord" -- a day spoken of again and again in the OT. It is also referred to in some passages in the NT.

This passage indicates that "the last days" which we are now in will be introduced with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has been active since creation, but there never has been a period of time in God's dealings with man which has been more characterized by the work of the Holy Spirit than these "last days." You will find more about the work of the Holy Spirit from John 14 on than you will in all of the preceding part of Scripture combined.

The Holy Spirit does not always work in the same way. "The last days" were introduced with spectacular signs (see vv. 17-19), and they will be concluded with spectacular signs (see v. 20). There will not continue to be the speaking in tongues, nor the visions, nor the dreams, but the prophesying will continue under the power and blessing of the Holy Spirit.

What are we to understand by prophesying?

Its main use in Scripture is not foretelling, but preaching -- telling forth the message of Christ, the message of salvation. This is the primary use of the term, prophet, in Scripture. He was primarily a preacher! This is why the Jews did not consider that Daniel was not a prophet -- because he was not a preacher!

In Paul's classic passage on preaching and the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 1, 2) he states what Peter was saying, and what Joel predicted hundreds of years before:

"For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." See 1 Cor. 1:21.

AND NOTE: SUCH PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL (as Peter will do in the following verses) INCLUDES THE UNIVERSAL OFFER OF SALVATION.

This is like John 3:16.

Peter does not say that Christ died for all men, that all men might be saved. He does not even say at this point that all men can believe. What he is saying is that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" -- AND THAT IS ALL THAT WE CAN SAY; THAT IS ALL THAT WE HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO SAY -- that anyone who trusts in Christ will be saved!

I say that to you this morning. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." I also say, "Neither is there salvation"

Oh, that we would understand these truths and the preaching of the Apostles!

But let me just briefly mention three other essential things having to do with the preaching of the Gospel -- and these all come from vv.14, 15.

II. THE UNITED TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLES: "Peter, standing up with the eleven."

Peter did the preaching, but the other eleven were solidly with him. They would have said exactly what he said if they had been speaking!

How important is our unity!

III. THE MANNER OF PETER'S PREACHING.

He stood. He spoke up. He called for their attention. It was important for them to hear, and to understand what he had to say. People must hear if they are going to be saved.

Cf. Rom. 10:13-17 where Paul is referring to Joel 2:32 and what it requires.

Finally, whether the comment in v. 13 were sincere, or said in scorn, Peter's immediate objective was

IV. THE CLARIFICATION OF WHAT WAS TAKING PLACE.

How did he do this? By the Word of God, and even by referring to that which could be expected according to their own experience.

He did not say that the Apostles drank, but he denied that they were drunk "seeing it" was "but the third hour of the day" -- nine o'clock in the morning.

It is interesting to see how drunkenness and the fullness of the Spirit are linked here and also in Eph. 5:18.

Concl: We must stop here. I want to spend two more Sundays on this message. But the important thing for now is that we understand:

- 1) How important it is to preach the Word.
- 2) How dependent we are upon the Holy Spirit.
- 3) How urgently we must beseech men to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in order that they might be saved.

THE WILL OF GOD IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST
or
PETER'S SERMON AT PENTECOST -- PART II
Acts 2:22-28

- Intro: We are considering the message which Peter gave on that most memorable of all the Days of Pentecost when things happened which had never happened before.

In the first part of the message (vv. 14-21) Peter told the Jews in Jerusalem what those miraculous events were not, and then what they were -- using Joel's prophecy as proof. Joel's passage (the part that Peter quoted) concluded with the words we find in v. 21 of Acts 2:

"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

This brings us to two points, the latter of which is Peter's main concern in our text this morning:

- 1) First of all we see that the object of all of these supernatural events is the salvation of men, that the men of Israel, in this case, would "call on the name of the Lord," and be saved!

But that point will never be realized unless men know

- 2) Who the Lord is that Peter is speaking about.

- Peter leaves no doubt at all but that he is referring to "Jesus," the despised Nazarene.

Note first how he traces

- I. THE EARTHLY COURSE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST (Acts 2: 22-24).

Note how he calls for their attention all over again as he did in v. 14.

And then be sure to notice the following:

- 1) V. 22 deals with our Lord's earthly life and ministry with its "miracles and wonders and signs" (two words of which occur in v. 19). (Explain.)
2) V. 23 speaks of our Lord's death -- and Peter is obviously concerned with the guilt of Israel.
3) And then in v. 24 we have our Lord's resurrection, thus giving us a full view of the Lord's course on earth.

- And so we have our Lord's humiliation, shown in His Name, "Jesus of Nazareth," culminating in His awful death on the Cross; His Deity, established by His "miracles and wonders and signs"; plus His death; and then His glorious resurrection, reuniting His body and His soul.

Be sure to notice how carefully Peter presented this even though he could say, especially concerning our Lord's life and ministry, "as ye yourselves also know"! We must never minimize the importance of making sure the people know the facts about our Lord's life, and death, and resurrection. Cf. Paul in 1 Cor. 15:3 ff. Even believers need to hear this continually -- that Christ lived a perfect life, died, and was raised in His body from the dead!

But then I want you to observe that Peter goes beyond the mere facts and does another very important thing. He very strongly establishes

II. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST.

He does this in v. 22, and in v. 23, and finally in v. 24.

A. The sovereignty of God in the works of Christ (v. 22).

What was God doing? He was showing by the "miracles and wonders and signs" that Christ was the Person He claimed to be. Peter speaks of the miracles as though Christ were just a passive agent to bring out the fact that God was at work. God did during Christ's life what He was repeating on the Day of Pentecost, and what would be repeated when the Lord returned -- giving unmistakable evidence of the Deity of His Son.

B. The sovereignty of God in the death of His Son (v. 23).

The Jews could only take Christ because God gave Him into their hands.

Cf. the Lord's words to Pilate in John 19:10, 11.

But this decision on the part of God was not made when the Jews decided to kill the Lord, nor at any time after He was born. It was made in eternity past -- "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." This was God's will for His Son. God had carefully laid it out, every detail, and He had it all in mind. None of the plan had for an instant been forgotten either by the Father or by the Son.

But, you say, how, then, could God hold them guilty? The first answer is because Scripture says that they

were guilty -- "by wicked hands," lit. lawless hands, they of their own volition took the Lord and killed Him. It looked like Judas and the Sanhedrin and Pilate and the Roman soldiers were all doing what they wanted to do (and they were), but God overruled in it all so that His purpose concerning His Son was being accomplished.

This is illustrated by what Joseph's brothers did to him. They were responsible. They were guilty, and they knew it. And yet through it God's perfect will was being done.

So let us not argue with the Word of God, but accept what has been clearly written.

But then we see

- C. The sovereignty of God in the resurrection of Christ (v. 24).

It was God Who raised Him up! Never forget that. The Jews were dealing with God, trying to nullify His eternal plan. And yet ultimately it is clear that God triumphs and that by their sin the Jews were actually responsible for bringing about that which they sought to destroy!

But notice how Peter explains this in the light of a very prominent subject in the Word of God. It is

III. THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF SCRIPTURE (Acts 2:25a).

Peter does not place the main emphasis on the resurrection of Christ

- 1) Because God was God, nor
 - 2) Because Jesus Christ was Jesus Christ,
- and, as such, They would obviously be greater and mightier than men. BUT PETER'S EMPHASIS IS THAT JESUS CHRIST COULD NOT STAY IN THE GRAVE, THE CAPTIVE OF DEATH, BECAUSE OF WHAT THE WORD OF GOD PREDICTED!

How could greater honor be given to the Scriptures?

When David wrote Psalm 16, while he was referring in a sense to himself, primarily he was prophesying the resurrection of Christ, the Messiah. He was speaking by the Spirit of God. His own hope of resurrection rested 100% on the resurrection of Christ!

Let us never doubt what God has promised in His Word, regardless of how many men may set themselves against Him, nor how black our circumstances might be.

One more point.

We need to see how this turned out for the Lord,
and also how it applied to David,
but also the way it applies to us.

Be sure to keep in mind that the words of Psalm 16 did not mean that our Lord would be spared even from death,
nor that David was spared from severe trials,
nor will it mean that you and I will be lifted
out of our difficulties,

but it does speak of the ultimate outcome in each case:

- 1) With the Lord.
- 2) With David.
- 3) With us.

What do we have in vv. 25-28?

IV. THE ABOUNDING JOY OF THE LORD (and of David -- and also that which can be ours) (Acts 2:25-28).

Note how it was realized.

A. Through the presence and protection of a sovereign Lord (v. 25).

B. The praise of the Messiah at the prospect of the Lord's care for Him (v. 26).

This was a joy that was the Lord's before Calvary.
Cf. Heb. 12:2.

C. The promise (v. 27).

The grave was not the end -- and the Lord knew it! David knew it, too, for the Messiah, and for himself. And we need to know it. Our Lord has conquered death and the grave. This was the reason even for Peter's boldness at this time. He no longer feared his enemies even though they might do to him as they did to the Lord. They could not move him out of the will of God. What glorious truth!

Finally,

D. The ultimate prospect (v. 28).

Think of the celebrating that was done in heaven when the Lord got back there! Think of what David did -- and Abraham -- and Moses -- and Isaiah -- and Jeremiah -- and all of the OT saints!!!!

Concl: But let me close by making the application to us now. And in doing so I want to use two verses which Peter wrote later, but which fit perfectly into this passage which we have been considering, verses which help us to see how all of this applies to us.

I am speaking of 1 Pet. 4:12, 13. (Read.)

Notice that we are to rejoice now in the prospect of the joy that will be ours then.

Never forget that your God is sovereign, and that He is never defeated. Men cannot nullify His will. All that they may do in their guilty sinfulness will be judged, but it all serves His purpose, His will, His eternal plan. This is the truth, and so it is the ground of our stability,

our joy,

our hope,

and it is the reason that we always have cause to praise and to worship Him.

Let us pray daily that we may be able to believe His Word and to trust Him so as to bring to Him the honor and glory which rightfully belongs to Him.

THE BOLDNESS OF PETER
or
PETER'S SERMON AT PENTECOST -- PART III
Acts 2:29-40

Intro: I hope that most of you remember the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, found in Acts, chapter 8. If you do, you will remember that during their conversation the eunuch asked Philip this question about Isaiah 53:

" . . . of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?" (Acts 8:34).

There is probably no more important question regarding the interpretation of OT prophecy!

In Isaiah 53, Isaiah could have been speaking of himself, or he could have been speaking about somebody else. Philip solves the problem and answers the eunuch's question when he opened "his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:35).

We have this same problem with Isaiah 7:14. Was Isaiah speaking about his own wife who was going to have a son, or was he speaking about some other woman and somebody else's son? (Quote the verse.)

Peter is faced with the same problem here!

Read Acts 2:25-28 again. Or read these verses in Psalm 16:8-11. Probably your first reaction is that David is speaking about himself! (Read the verses omitting the first part of verse 25.)

But what does Peter say before he quoted Psalm 16? He said this:

"For David speaketh concerning him," i.e., "Jesus of Nazareth" (if you will read the context carefully).

What is Peter doing? He is expounding Scripture. And, like any good expositor, he must now prove that he is right!

This brings me to my first point:

I. DAVID WAS NOT SPEAKING ABOUT HIMSELF.

Before I show you how Peter proved this, let me call your attention to the word, "freely," in v. 29. In the Greek these are identically the same words that are translated, "boldly," in Heb. 4:16,

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace . . ."

It does not mean that we are to come with crass boldness to God. We need to remember always that He is God and that He is to be approached with reverence, with humility, even with fear! But what does it mean? It means that when we

come to God we come to tell him everything, to speak thoroughly, clearly, fully; we come to tell him everything that is upon our hearts.

This is what Peter now intends to do about David -- to be very thorough and clear in proving that the prophecy of Psalms 16 could not possibly refer to David himself -- that he was not speaking about himself, but about someone else!

Peter does this in two ways:

- A. He reminds his hearers that David's body is still in the grave (Acts 2:29).
- B. Consequently, he brings in Psalm 110:1 and shows also that David has not ascended into heaven to sit at God's right hand (Acts 2:34, 35).

As great as David was in the eyes of the people of Israel, and in the plan and purpose of God, these prophecies were not prophecies about him. He was speaking of someone else!

So my second point is this:

II. DAVID WAS SPEAKING OF THE COMING MESSIAH.

Here let me ask and answer three questions.

- A. How could David speak of Christ?

The answer is in the first part of verse 30 -- BECAUSE HE WAS A PROPHET! He spoke the Word of God. Psalm 16 and Psalm 110 are here declared by Peter to have been divinely inspired (after the order of 2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

- B. What did David say about Christ?

- 1. He said that God had not only promised to raise up (meaning, to resurrect) one of David's sons to sit on his, i.e., David's, throne, but God had shown the certainty and the importance of this by confirming His promise with His oath!

Note also the expression, "according to the flesh." This means that David understood that this Heir to his throne would be more than a mere man!

Thus, according to OT prophecy, and according to Peter's interpretation of that prophecy, we have some tremendous revelations regarding the fact that David was not only not speaking of himself, but that he had amazing understanding about the Messiah which we can

see in our text.

2. The details of the revelation that David had about Christ, the Messiah:
 - a. He knew about the coming Messiah.
 - b. He knew that the Messiah would be born in his family, "according to the flesh."
 - c. He knew about the Deity of the Messiah.
 - d. He knew that the Messiah would die.
 - e. He knew that the Messiah would be raised again.
 - f. He knew that the Messiah would be exalted to the Father's right hand.
 - g. He knew that the day would come when all of the Messiah's enemies would become His "footstool" -- and that God would bring it about!

David may not have understood the time sequence of all of these things, as Peter himself states in 1 Peter 1:10-12 (read), but he did understand all of these truths about Christ. "Seeing this before" means, foreseeing this, which is what he as a prophet could do!

What an amazing revelation this is about the truth which had been given to David!

But now for our third question:

C. What had actually happened?

See verse 32.

All of these things had actually happened to "Jesus of Nazareth" (v. 22). "Jesus" had actually fulfilled all of the requirements in these passages so that we now are able to see Who David was speaking about!

This brings us to:

III. PETER'S MAJESTIC CONCLUDING STATEMENT CONCERNING WHAT GOD HAD DECLARED THROUGH THESE EVENTS ABOUT "JESUS."

See verse 36.

It was important for "all the house of Israel" to know the teaching of Scripture and to know about "Jesus." And Peter wants them to know this "assuredly" -- an interesting word which actually implied that these truths are so clear that no one can slip by them or trip over them!

God had "made" His Son "both Lord and Christ, not in the sense that He suddenly became "Lord and Christ," but that

through His death, resurrection, and ascension, and their harmony with OT prophecy, "Jesus" was openly shown to be both Deity and Messiah. Putting all of these names together we now see that "Jesus" is the Lord Jesus Christ!

The last four verses of our text give us

IV. THE RESULTS OF PETER'S MESSAGE (Acts 2:37-40).

The message did not actually end with verse 36. See verse 40a.

But immediately people in the crowd "were pricked in their heart." Homer uses this word to described the way a horse's hoof bites into the ground. The people were stung, stunned, pierced, pained with grief, horrified over what they had done.

Be sure to notice where Peter had brought them with his message:

- 1) They had killed their Messiah.
- 2) They had rejected the prophecy of their great King, David.
- 3) They had opposed the Word of God.
- 4) They had rejected what God Himself was doing.

It is little wonder that they said, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" What could they do? They were doubly deserving to be cast forever from the presence of the Lord!

But there was hope! This was the reason for Peter's preaching. And he proceeds to give to the crowd what Calvin calls "the two parts of the Gospel" (XVIII, 117): repentance and the remission of sins."

"Repent" literally means after-knowledge. It means to see things in a completely different way, to be sorry for what has been done, and to intend to change.

"Be baptized" was not a part of the saving work, but the confession of Christ by this outward and visible sign which God had ordained for His people. The fact that it was to be done "in the name of Jesus Christ" was evidence that their faith was in "Jesus Christ" and in what He had done!

We see the sovereignty of God in the salvation of these Jews (and in the salvation of Gentiles also) when we note the true nature of:

- 1) Repentance -- see 2 Tim. 2:25.
- 2) Our calling to salvation -- see Acts 2:39. The last part of the verse explains the extent of the first part of the verse.

Even verse 40 sounds like a doctrine of self-salvation!

But what do these expressions mean?

They mean, not that we can do any of these things on our own, but that this is what God holds us accountable for. "It is God which worketh in us . . ." (Phil. 2:13) -- and this has to be written over all that has to do with our salvation. Verse 40 shows the break that must come to all who profess true faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Concl: Spurgeon tells about a father and mother who ran an ill that had a very bad reputation. One night a young man came to spend the night there. They noticed that he had a purse of gold with him. During the night they killed the young man in order to take his gold. Imagine their horror later when they discovered that they had killed their own son who had been away for many years and had come back to help them during their old age! The gold was to have been theirs anyway, but they ignorantly and tragically killed their son to get it.

Have any of you been "pricked" in your hearts this morning? Then perhaps God is dealing with you. Turn from your sin of rejecting Christ, "repent," believe in Christ, turn from your sins and all of the evils of this wicked, crooked generation. God will save you through His Son, your sins will be forgiven, and the Holy Spirit will come immediately to indwell you and to teach you and to strengthen you so that you may break with your sins and live for the glory of God.

THE FRUITS OF THE GOSPEL
Acts 2:41-47

Intro: There are four main divisions to Acts 2 which we need to keep in mind:

- 1) The miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the first 13 verses which resulted in the gift of tongues.
- 2) The preaching of the Apostle Peter as he explained what was taking place. See vv. 14-36.
- 3) This is followed by his exhortations to the people to repent and be baptized (vv. 37-40).
- 4) Finally we have both the immediate and the continuing results of Peter's ministry in the last 7 verses (vv. 41-47).

It is apparent that the Lord was at work. See vv. 37, 39, 41, 43, 47.

But it is also clear that there was a response from the people. See v. 37. And then notice what Peter tells them to do in vv. 38, 40. And then we have the statements of what they did in vv. 41, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47a.

So the sovereign action of God does not eliminate the responsibility of man, but it rather explains it. The results which we observe in our text for the morning were immediate,
profound,
continuing,
and corporate (as compared with that which is only personal).

This chapter gives us the first real evidence in the book of Acts that salvation really transforms people, and that that transformation is permanent and continuing! Thus we see the proofs of regeneration and also of the perseverance of the saints!

Before we look at the results in vv. 41-47 . . .

let me raise the question from v. 38,
Are repentance and baptism both conditions for salvation? Are they of equal importance for salvation?

Let me ask you another question. When Peter says in verse 40, "Save yourselves . . .," was he teaching that we save ourselves -- and that salvation is not, after all, God's work in our behalf?

How are we to answer these questions?

There is only one way: By taking all that the Word of God has to say about salvation.

What do we find when we do look at the teaching of Scripture

generally? We find this:

- 1) That salvation is not a work of man in any sense of the word, but exclusively a work of God.
- 2) That salvation is not, therefore, dependent upon our being baptized (which is a work we do), but is exclusively based upon faith alone. Repentance is a part of true faith -- and the Bible makes it very clear that both repentance and faith are the gift of God. You cannot repent in the true, Biblical sense of the word, without believing in Christ, nor can you believe without repenting.

What, then, is the purpose of baptism?

Baptism is the immersion in water of one who has believed as a confirmation of that person's faith in Christ.

Dana and Mantey in their grammar of the Greek New Testament say that one translation of the preposition () which is used here is because of. This would apply here. They were not to be baptized in order that their sins might be forgiven, but because of the fact that they had been forgiven!

Baptism is not even mentioned again in Acts until chapter 8. Neither is it mentioned at all in the major passages of the Bible that deal with salvation. Therefore we are justified in saying that baptism is not a condition of salvation, but that it follows as a confirmation of one's faith in Christ, that he has been joined with Christ, and that his sins are washed away!

Baptism was important, but Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 1:17 confirms the teaching of Scripture that it was not in the same category as repentance, or faith.

What is repentance? (See Pink's statement from his book on Joshua.)

So let it be clear that this was a work of God. He was convicting, and He was calling. But the testimony of Scripture is that men must repent, and that they ought to be baptized -- that they can go to heaven if they are not baptized, but that they cannot go to heaven if they fail to repent!

Now, I trust, we are ready to look at the fruit, or the lasting results, of this work of God.

Let me mention five in particular.

I. "THE TRUE AND NATURAL FACE OF THE CHURCH" (Acts 2:42).

This is what Calvin calls it.

Of what use are our faces? They identify us. They distin-

Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts xx, 21). It is very clear from these passages that repentance is as necessary as faith. Nay, we go farther, and declare that an *impenitent* heart is incapable of exercising a saving faith. Christ complained to Israel's leaders, "Ye repented not afterward, *that* ye might believe in him" (Matt. xxi, 32)—they responded not to the ministry of His forerunner because they had no realization of their sinful and lost condition. Those "dispensationalists" who state that repentance is required only of the Jews evince their ignorance of the most elementary truths of Scripture, for in "the great commission" Christ ordered His servants "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among *all* nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke xxiv, 47), and His apostle announced that God "now [in this Christian era!] commandeth all men *everywhere* to repent" (Acts xvii, 30). Of course He does, for such a call is the pressing of His holy claims upon those who have ignored the same—who have disregarded His authority, slighted His law, and lived entirely to please themselves. It is because so little repentance has been preached that Christendom is now crowded with empty professors.

Repentance is a taking sides with God against myself. It is the laying aside of my awful enmity against Him. It is the privative side of conversion, for there must be a turning from something before there can be a turning unto God. Repentance consists of a holy horror and hatred of sin, a complete heart-forsaking of it, a sincere confessing of it unto God. True repentance is always accompanied by a deep longing and a genuine determination to abandon that course which is displeasing to God. It is impossible, in the very nature of the case, that a soul could seek God's pardon with any *honesty* while he continued to defy Him and persist in what He forbids. Thus, repentance is the sinner's making his peace with God—the throwing down of the weapons of his rebellion, ceasing his warfare against Him. Nor is there anything in the least degree "legalistic" or meritorious about this, for repentance or making peace with God neither atones for our vile misconduct of the past nor moves God to be gracious unto us. Repentance no more *purchases* salvation than does faith, yet the one is as indispensable as the other. The wicked is required to "forsake his way . . . and return unto the Lord" before He will have mercy upon him and abundantly pardon (Isaiah lv, 7, and cf. I Kings viii, 47-50; Acts iii, 19).

"Now it came to pass, when Adonizedek king of Jerusalem had heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it; as he had done to Jericho and her king, so he had done to Ai and her king; and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had *made peace* with Israel, and were among them; that they feared greatly" (Joshua x, 1, 2). Once more we would note the very varied effects upon different ones of what they had "heard" of Israel's exploits, and how some of them attributed their successes unto Jehovah, while others did not so. Rahab (ii, 9-11) and the Gibeonites (ix, 9) were examples of the former, and the king of ix, 1, and this Adonizedek of the latter. The king of Jerusalem, despite his high-sounding name, gave God no place in his thoughts; yet he was thoroughly alarmed at Israel's progress. His fear was cumulative. He was rendered uneasy at the tidings of Jericho's overthrow, still more so at the news of the destruction of Ai; but when he and his subjects learned of the Gibeonites having concluded a league of peace with Joshua, "they feared greatly"—most probably because he had counted on *their* considerable support in resisting these aggressors.

We would also attentively heed the Spirit's emphasis here on the time mark: "It came to pass, *when* Adonizedek . . . heard." There is nothing

guish us from all other people.

A thief hides his face. Think of the confusion that is caused by identical twins. The only way we can make people think we are somebody else (i.e., by wearing their clothes) is by concealing our faces. You basically recognize a person by his face.

This is what we need to recognize about verse 42 and, in fact, about this whole passage: IF YOU SEE THESE FACIAL CHARACTERISTICS, YOU HAVE THE CHURCH; IF NOT, YOU DO NOT HAVE THE CHURCH.

There are four characteristics to the face of the true Church, and of any true, local, New Testament church:

- A. "The apostles' doctrine." Calvin calls this "the soul of the Church." It is very important to see that this is mentioned first.
- B. "Fellowship."

Have you ever tried to define fellowship?

Cf. 1 Cor. 1:9; 1 John 1:3 -- the two aspects of our fellowship.

It speaks of our oneness in the things of God and Christ and in our communion with each other in the truths of the Word.

- C. "Breaking of bread." In the context this cannot be merely eating with each other (as it is in verse 46), but this has to do with the Lord's Supper -- the remembrance of Christ!

See the two prerequisites -- and remember the warnings given in 1 Corinthians 11.

- D. "Prayers."

This most likely refers to the praying that they did together in addition to the praying that they did individually and privately.

Thus, it is important to note three things:

- 1) What they did.
- 2) That they did these things continually.
- 3) That they did them together.

One of the first signs that a person has been truly saved is that he will be drawn to other believers, to the church.

But notice a second result:

II. THE EFFECT OF THE CHURCH UPON THE WORLD.

Two things are mentioned. These are not always present (as the book of Acts clearly indicates), but they were here.

A. "Fear came upon every soul" (Acts 2:43a).

There is a question as to whether or not this refers to people in the church, or outside. But the context seems to point to those outside.

This was probably God's way of preserving the church at this time. One commentator says,

" . . . the Jews would never have suffered the Church of Christ to stand one minute of an hour, unless the Lord had restrained them with fear as with a bridle" (Calvin, XVIII, 128).

B. At the same time it is stated that they were "having favour (grace) with all the people" (Acts 2:47a).

This meant that they could not deny but that a work of God was being done, and the result of this is given in the latter part of verse 47.

But there was also a third result:

III. THE ATTITUDE OF BELIEVERS TOWARD EACH OTHER (Acts 2:44-46).

A. There was a detachment with reference to material things (vv. 44, 45).

This was not commanded; it was spontaneous. It is not mentioned as taking place in any other church. It did not continue even in Jerusalem.

B. The reason for the above was that they were so greatly concerned about each other.

C. They met with each other daily "in the temple" -- the only place they had for congregational gatherings.

Perhaps they hoped for reform within the temple ministry, just as the Reformers hoped for reformation within the Catholic Church -- and just as we look for reform in established churches today -- but it was not to be!

However, we have this result in those early days.

But there is a fourth result:

IV. THE EFFECT UPON THEIR HOMES (Acts 2:46b). Also v. 47a.

Here the reference is to eating their daily food. They did it:

- 1) "With gladness" -- extreme joy.
- 2) "Singleness of heart" -- which, lit., is without rocks (in speaking of a field), meaning smooth, plain.
- 3) "Praising God" -- meaning singing praises.

The message of this verse seems to be that the test of any home is to be seen in the spirit that prevails at the table when the family is eating together.

Prayer and praise took on new significance in their homes. The music of the home was affected.

We might add this last point to what ~~was~~ said earlier in connection with the effect of the Lord's work on the world, but we mention it here because it is worthy of a place by itself.

V. THE INCREASE OF THE CHURCH (Acts 2:47).

What a lesson this is on evangelism!

As all of these other things were going on in the church and among the people of God, God continued to bless the work daily by adding to the church those He was saving. How could it be any clearer?

Concl: Do you not long for days like these in Acts 2? How can it be? Acts 1 and 2 give us our answer:

- 1) By prayer, much prayer, continual prayer.
- 2) By obedience to the Word.
- 3) By oneness, harmony, fellowship within the church.
- 4) By the preaching of the true Gospel of the grace of God -- a Gospel which exalts God and His Son; a Gospel which humbles man.

Let these things be our main concern and perhaps the Lord will visit us with real blessings as He has done so many times before with His people. The work must begin with us.

"A NOTABLE MIRACLE"

Acts 3:1-10

Intro: We have just completed the 2nd chapter in which we have considered the first message of the book of Acts. We have seen the first instance in Scripture of the baptism of the Holy Spirit by which the infant Church was brought into existence. We have seen the second miraculous event recorded in the book: the believers speaking in tongues. (The first miraculous event was the ascension of the Lord Jesus and the appearance of the angels afterwards.) In chapter 2 we also have the record of the largest number ever brought to the Lord at one time: "And the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41b).

The early church has gotten started in a most spectacular way.

But now we are ready for chapter 3. At first it would seem that we have left the miraculous behind. Peter and John are simply going to the temple for the third hour of prayer on a particular day. We do not know how long this was after the Day of Pentecost in chapter 2, but there are no tongues, no assembled crowd (except for the people who were going to the temple). It just seems like an ordinary day.

But we are soon to realize that this was not just an ordinary day. In fact, as we read ahead, we realize that chapter 4 goes with chapter 3 -- that they form one continuous series of events.

It all follows the first miracle of physical healing in the book. In Acts 2:43 we read that there had been miracles before, but this is the first actual account.

What was the Lord doing?

J. A. Alexander (p. 97) expresses it this way:

Thus far the infant church had enjoyed the favour both of God and man. But this state of things was not designed to last. Opposition, and even persecution, were essential to the execution of the divine purpose, not only as a means of moral discipline, but also as a means of outward growth.

And then he goes on to state that it was not God's purpose that the work of the church be only Jewish and that it remain in Jerusalem. It was to be universal in its character and scope. And so, he adds,

In order to attain its end, it must be spread; and in order to be spread, it must be scattered; and in order to be scattered, it must undergo strong pressure, from within and from without. (*Italics mine.*) The history now

presents to us the series of providential causes by which these effects were brought about. The subject of the next two chapters is the first attack upon the church, occasioned by a signal miracle and apostolical discourse. (*Italics mine again.*)

When we read in Acts 8:1 that

"there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles,"

(the second great work of the Spirit in expanding the work of the Church), remember that it all got started with this miracle in Acts 3! The event which led ultimately to the stoning of Stephen and to the martyrdom of James was this healing of this "certain man" who had been "lame from his mother's womb" (v. 2).

But there is another side to this whole story.

This miracle led to another great opportunity for the Apostle Peter to preach. Acts 4:4 tells us that there was another great addition to the ranks of the church. And, along with the opposition, there was more prayer and a most unusual answer to that prayer when the apostles preached with "great power" and the whole church experienced "great grace." See 4:33.

So opposition, trials, suffering, always leads to greater blessing! This has been the experience of the Lord's people from the beginning of time.

First of all, in considering our text let us notice . . .

I. THE FACTS GIVEN.

There are three parts to the passage.

- A. The scene of the miracle (vv. 1-3).
- B. The account of the miracle (vv. 4-8).
- C. The results of the miracle -- the immediate results (vv. 9, 10).

In connection with the scene we are introduced to

- 1) the principal characters in the story,
- 2) the location of the miracle -- in the temple area.
- 3) the time of the miracle -- "at the hour of prayer," the third one of the day, sometime after 3 in the afternoon -- probably following the evening sacrifice.
- 4) the hopelessness of the situation: a man who had never walked.
- 5) the lame man's purpose in being there: not for healing,

but for money, "an alms," "a donation to the poor" (Thayer, p. 203).

Two different words are used for ask in verse 2 and 3 which bring out the expectation of the crippled man. The first has to do with what you want, but the second emphasizes more the person from which you want it. In other words, when the man saw Peter and John, he recognized them, and felt certain that they would surely give him some money.

But what about the miracle itself? How was it performed?

Notice what Peter did in v. 4, and then what he said. It is obvious from v. 5 that the crippled man knew that Peter was about to give him something. But how disappointing Peter's first words must have been: "Silver and gold have I none."

But then Peter said something and did something that had never even entered the mind of the crippled man -- and we must note that this was the case even though hundreds, perhaps thousands, of miracles had been performed right there in Jerusalem, not only by the Apostles, but also by the Lord Jesus!

IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THE MAN WAS NOT ONLY PHYSICALLY CRIPPLED, BUT HE WAS ALSO SPIRITUALLY BLIND! I want to come back to this in a moment.

Peter wanted to make it clear that he was not the One Who was performing the miracle, as he specifically states in v. 12. It was the Lord Jesus Who was the Miracle-Worker!

A. T. Robertson (III, 42) says this about the man's response when Peter said, "Rise up and walk":

"But the beggar does not budge. He knows that he cannot walk."

He must have tried to walk many times. It could have seemed as though Peter was mocking him. So he sat there.

But Peter took him by the hand. He suddenly felt that his feet and ankle bones were receiving strength, and Luke, writing as a doctor, says that as he came to his feet he came "leaping up," an expression which conveys two ideas:

- 1) It was like he was coming up right out of the ground. He came up like he was going to continue going up! Few men have ever gotten up like he did!

But the word also means another thing.

- 2) He came up complete and perfect with regard to his physical condition. He came out of the condition that he had been in for more than 40 years. See Acts 4:22.

And then he did three other things that he had never done before:

- 1) He "stood."
- 2) He "walked."
- 3) He began "praising God."

What were the results? See them in vv. 9, 10.

- 1) Everybody saw it. In Acts 4:16 the Sanhedrin called it "a notable miracle," which meant that it was known everywhere throughout Jerusalem.
- 2) There was no doubt in anybody's mind but that it was the man they had seen at the Temple every day begging.
- 3) The event filled the people with both wonder and fear (which is the meaning of the word "amazement"), but they were also rendered immovable (which is what "wonder" means).

And so I trust that you understand the story itself.

But there is another aspect of this miracle that I want to deal with before I finish. It is this:

II. THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE.

I have already mentioned that the Church's enemies called this event "a notable miracle," a well-known miracle. But the word that they used for "miracle" means a sign -- something which is not only important in itself, but which also points to something beyond itself which is even more important!

Calvin states in the following words what practically every true and thorough expositor of the Scriptures recognizes in the miracles of Scripture. He wrote long ago:

" . . . we have in this history a type or figure of our spiritual restoring; namely, that as the Word, laid hold on by faith, did restore the cripple to his limbs, so the Lord pierceth into our souls by the Word, that he may restore the same" (XVIII, 140).

May I just briefly point this out -- both for the delight of those of you who know the Lord, and for the possible salvation of those of you who need to know Him?

This miracle sets before us once again, in the first place,

A. Man's tragic condition without Christ.

He has been in trouble ever since he was born. Cf. Psa. 51:5; 58:3.

He is helpless and hopeless. And the tragedy is increased when you see that he is usually more interested in money than he is in a miraculous change, more interested in the things of this life than in a miracle that would prepare him for the life to come.

Illus: The man who called me last night for money to get his family to another city.

No one has ever called me about spiritual things like many have called to ask for money.

But there is a second thing I want you to see:

B. The power and authority of Jesus Christ. See v. 6.

Peter could not help this crippled man. Neither could John help him. But Jesus Christ could, AND DID!

To invoke the name of the Lord is to invoke the Lord! He was not dead, nor had His Name lost its power!

And it is apparent that before the crippled man could shoot up like he was coming out of the ground and heading straight for heaven, before he could stand, or walk, or even before he would praise God, something had to happen to those feet and ankle bones. A miracle had to take place. What people saw was the result of the miracle, but what God did was something within the man which he realized as Peter lifted him to his feet.

You see, what we do is not the miracle, but the result of the miracle. We walk in newness of life not to make ourselves Christians, but we walk because God has done a miraculous work in our hearts -- the greatest miracle of all: the new birth!

Finally, notice:

C. The immediate results again:

1. With the man.

a. He was completely changed.

b. He wanted to be with Peter and John, and he "entered with them into the temple" (v. 8).

2. With the people. There was no question in anyone's

mind but that a miraculous work had been done! They could not deny the evidence. See Acts 4:14-16.

Concl: This is what salvation is. It is a work which God does. He does it, not because people deserve it, but simply because He has chosen to do it. And when He works, no one can deny but that a work has been done. It is an internal work of the heart that manifests itself outwardly in a life that is completely different.

What an illustration this story is of the truth of 2 Cor. 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ . . . "

Will you be made spiritually whole today? Then put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter himself gives us the word we need in Acts 4:12 -- a part of this story. More important than anything else is your need of Christ. Come to Him today. Believe in Him, and you will be saved.

AND WHY
HOW WAS THE LAME MAN HEALED?

Acts 3:11-26

Intro: A most unusual miracle had just been performed -- a man who had been crippled from birth had been healed!

The commotion that it caused in Jerusalem was frightening. The people were beside themselves. The situation was almost out-of-hand.

Peter knew that the question on every person's heart was, HOW WAS THE LAME MAN HEALED? The immediate tendency was to give Peter and John the credit since they had been the instruments that God had used.

A situation similar to this took place later in the book of Acts under the ministry of Paul and Barnabas at Lystra (Acts 14:8-18). On that occasion the people prepared to worship Paul and Barnabas -- and Paul stopped them. Here there was no telling what would happen. And so Peter speaks up:

- 1) To deny that it was something that he and John had done.
- 2) To give the proper glory to God, and to the Lord Jesus.
- 3) To explain the implications of the miracle. Remember that miracles were signs, meaning that they had a purpose far beyond the immediate healing.

Peter's message is really twofold:

- 1) In vv. 13-15 he gives witness to the things that had just taken place in Jerusalem -- and he wanted the "men of Israel" to know that this miracle was a proof that Jesus Christ was alive. Furthermore there were many present who had seen the Lord after His resurrection.

On their witness, cf. Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32 -- and then be on the lookout for it through the book of Acts. Cf. also 1 Cor. 15:5-8.

God had performed the miracle -- not Peter, and not John, and certainly not the lame man. And God had done it in such a way as to glorify His Son, and the Name of His Son. (Actually the word "Son" is better translated, Servant, linking it with the Messianic passages of the OT.)

Thus, the evidence for the resurrection of Christ was overwhelming.

But Peter does another important thing.

- 2) In vv. 17-25 he shows that these events were all in perfect harmony with the writings of the prophets in the OT.

See esp. vv. 18, 21, 25.

And even here Peter does not give the credit to the prophets, but he says repeatedly that God was speaking through them.

Thus Peter shows that there is perfect harmony between the healing of the lame man, and the witness of the Apostles, and

the OT Scriptures!

The sin of this particular group of Jews was aggravated by their part in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ! Note Peter's strong words in vv. 13-15! He admits that they were ignorant of what they were doing, but sins of ignorance are still sins! And so he calls on them to repent and to change so that their sins could be "blotted out," and so they could be turned completely away from their sins. See vv. 19, 26.

HOW WAS THE LAME MAN HEALED? God did it!

And Peter takes this miracle as an illustration of the Gospel.

What, then, are the main lessons that we are to learn from the message which Peter brought?

- I. HIS EMPHASIS ON GOD, AND ON JESUS CHRIST, IN CONNECTION WITH ALL THAT HAS TO DO WITH OUR SALVATION.

(Read the sections of the sermon where God and/or Christ are specifically mentioned.)

Peter uses the miracle as a means of preaching the Gospel. And all through his message we see that salvation is a work which God does through His Son and for the glory of His Son!

Man's tendency is to humanize salvation!

That is illustrated in the way the miracle was performed.

- II. HIS EMPHASIS ON FAITH -- AND ESPECIALLY THAT EVEN IT COMES FROM GOD.

See v. 16. How interesting that Peter would talk to unbelievers about the source of our faith! Cf. Rom. 10:17; Heb. 12:2; Eph. 2:8, 9.

This man who was healed exercised faith, but the faith came from God, not from himself!

It is important to know this also in connection with our salvation.

- III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PERFECT WORK THAT WAS PERFORMED ON THE LAME MAN.

See the words "perfect soundness." It points to the fact that when the Lord healed him there were no physical defects remaining -- there was nothing else physically that the Lord could have done for him!

What a picture of our salvation!

- A. This has to do with our sins. See vv. 19, 26.

- B. This has to do with the return of our Lord in glory: "the times of refreshing" (v. 19), pointing to a cooling off (which would follow the suffering of the Lord's people).

If the Lord in His sovereignty could overrule the hatred of the Jews so that what they did was actually a fulfillment of God's plans for their salvation, then He could surely see that the promised "times of refreshing" actually would come.

- C. Finally, note the reference to "the times of restitution of all things." Cf. v. 21.

This points to the ultimate end of salvation. Just as the man was better than he had ever been, so the Lord will restore the universe so that it is better than it was even before the Fall!

What an amazing illustration Peter had in this healed man of the full scope of our salvation. Cf. Rom. 8:18-23.

But notice another thing from Peter's message:

IV. THE PERFECT AGREEMENT CONCERNING SALVATION BETWEEN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT.

There are not two or three or seven ways of salvation in Scripture. THERE IS JUST ONE WAY. It is always and only through Christ!

Peter mentions "all" of the prophets. See vv. 18, 21, 24. And then he specifically mentions Moses and Samuel and Abraham.

Thus Peter was not preaching a new doctrine, but he was declaring the hope of all of the prophets of Israel. Cf. Acts 4:12 which applies to all times.

Finally,

V. A WARNING.

Notice Peter's emphasis on "ignorance." This is a very important aspect of Scriptural teaching. See v. 17.

Cf. also Luke 23:34. Also 1 Tim. 1:13.

Judas was not ignorant. Neither was Esau. Cf. Heb. 12:16, 17.

Now contrast ~~these~~ passages with Heb. 10:26-31. It is the

most dangerous thing to hear the Word and to understand the Word, and then to reject the Word!

Cf. John 9:41; 15:22. The Gospel was sent to the Jews "first" (Acts 3:26), with the implication that it would later go to the Gentiles also. But here Peter is dispelling their ignorance, and making them fully responsible for their response to the Gospel.

We cannot say when men reject the Gospel in the full knowledge of what they are doing, but we need to be warned of the possibility.

Concl: The healed man is God's illustration of salvation -- a work of God, by faith in Christ, a perfect work, the same in the OT as in the NT. And yet with it all there is a solemn warning.

Cf. Acts 13:46.

THE APOSTLES IN COURT
Acts 4:1-22

Intro: In some ways there are some parallels in teaching the book of Acts as compared with teaching the book of Genesis. We are dealing in both books with things that happened for the first time.

For example, in Genesis you must deal with the first day, the first creation, the first man, the first Sabbath, the first temptation, the first sin, the first judgment, etc.

In Acts, in connection with the Church, you have the first meeting, the first message, the first converts, the first miracle -- and these are followed by a lot of other firsts!

In our passage this morning we come to the first opposition. The Apostles had been well-acquainted with trouble during the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, but this was the first that they had had to face by themselves. It is very possible that Peter and John stood right where the Lord Jesus had stood when He appeared before the Sanhedrin! If so, what a different Peter they saw -- and, if so, what ominous implications this must have had for these Apostles as the work of the Church was just beginning!

And, as in teaching the book of Genesis and in dealing with the firsts that we find there, we are often compelled to say, "This was the first, but it was not the last," so we must say the same here. THIS WAS THE FIRST OPPOSITION, BUT IT WAS BY NO MEANS THE LAST! This was mild in comparison with the opposition that was coming. This is the first evidence that the Church had of the attitude of the world toward them and toward the message that they had to proclaim. And as often as the Church has stayed by its message, it has gotten this kind of a response from the world -- wherever it has been proclaimed! But, when the message has been changed, or watered down, there has been little or no trouble! One way in which we can check to see if we are preaching what the early Church preached is by noticing whether or not we are getting the same kind of response from the world that they got.

But now let us turn to our text in Acts 4 -- and let us notice

I. THE SUCCESSION OF EVENTS AT THIS TIME.

It sound very much like a court report in our own day.

A. First, they were arrested (Acts 4:1-4).

Notice two things:

- 1) The reason they were arrested -- in v. 2.
- 2) The evidence of blessing in spite of the opposition -- in v. 4.

- B. Secondly, they were interrogated (Acts 4:5-14).

The Jews were not exactly honest in their questioning. (See v. 7, and compare this with v. 2.) But Peter gave them the answer they asked for -- and then he gave them a lot that they did not ask for!

- C. Thirdly, the Council deliberated (Acts 4:15-17).

There is no question but that the men on the Council were in trouble. In fact, after Peter's remarks it was as one commentator has ^{said that the} ~~accusers~~ became the accused, and they were the ones who stood on trial!

They would like to have done more, but they were afraid of the people. See v. 21.

- D. Fourth and lastly, the Apostles were threatened (Acts 4:18-22).

So this opposition actually amounted to nothing but a night in jail, a temporary interruption in their preaching, and a certain degree of humiliation (perhaps) at being charged with such a normally powerful group as the Sanhedrin!

Before we go back to consider the earlier part of the story, note how circumstances thrust upon the Apostles the need to answer some important questions for all time to come. Such as,

- 1) What do you do when the authority of men comes into open conflict with the will of God?
- 2) How do you carry on your work in such a time, secretly, or openly?
- 3) Is the grace of God sufficient for the Lord's servants in a time like this to give them the courage to carry on in their work in spite of the threats?

It would be impossible to number those saints throughout the history of the Church who have found strength and guidance from these few verses at the end of our text.

But now let us go back and take a closer look at Peter and John, the men through whom the Lord did these mighty works. What kind of men were they? Is there any possibility that we can be like they were?

II. THE DESCRIPTION OF PETER AND JOHN.

Basically three things are said. The first is not too complimentary.

- A. "They were unlearned and ignorant men" (Acts 4:13).
What does this mean?

Actually it means that Peter and John were a couple of nobodies! They were the kind of men the Sanhedrin should not have bothered themselves with. "Unlearned" means that they had not been trained in the schools of the day; "ignorant" means that they had no position, no standing -- they were not recognized rabbis! They were nothing!

But this is the way that the Lord intended that it should be. Cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-31.

What a warning this should be to us against educational systems! They can be great instruments in the hands of God, but it seems that they quickly deteriorate into accrediting organizations for the Church. The Lord's servants are judged by the years that they have spent in school and by the degrees that they have. Sometimes this means a great deal; in other cases it means nothing. It is quite interesting to see that these early servants of the Lord were not known for their schooling. In fact, they were despised because they had none. And yet look at what happened under their ministry.

Now, so we won't think that the Word of God puts a premium on ignorance, let us look more closely to see what else is said about Peter and John.

Look at v. 13 again -- the last part:

- B. "They (the Sanhedrin) took knowledge of them (Peter and John), that they (Peter and John) had been with Jesus."

Oh, how much is bound up in that little preposition, "with."

Cf. Mark 3:14 with reference to the calling of the twelve -- "that they should be with him."

This is where Peter and John had been living. This is where they had learned. "Jesus" was the One Who had trained them. And this was not only descriptive of their lives before our Lord's ascension, but even afterwards! This is a fellowship which you and I can enjoy. This is more important than all of the schools on earth. In fact, if our schools do not teach our young servants of the Lord how to live with the Lord and how to walk with the Lord, they are more of a hindrance than they are a help!

People notice our education today, and our equipment, and our methods, but do they notice something about us that indicates that we live in the very presence of the Lord of glory?

Let us dwell on these words until the importance is forever stamped upon our hearts.

But there is another thing that we need to notice.

- C. Peter was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 8). And undoubtedly the same was true of John!

How can you be filled with the Holy Spirit? From the context of this chapter it is evident that, if we are with the Lord Jesus on a daily, regular basis, and if we are learning the Word from Him, we will be filled with the Holy Spirit!

Again notice that this is not necessarily connected with schooling! You have the educated Sanhedrin here, men who did not even know the Lord. On the other hand, you have untrained, unrecognized fishermen -- regenerated, taught by the Lord, filled with the Spirit -- and they were the men whom God used to turn Jerusalem upside down!

But there is one more thing for us to notice in this passage. What was the proof that these men, Peter and John, had been with the Lord, and that they were filled with the Holy Spirit? After all, these are easy claims to make, but there has to be some evidence that they are true! What does our text indicate as to:

III. THE EVIDENCE OF GOD'S HAND UPON THEM.

- A. They preached and taught.

This was the big problem to the Sanhedrin. See v. 2. And this was what they wanted stopped. See v. 18. And yet there never has been a great moving of the Spirit of God throughout the history of the Church which did not come through preaching!

Cf. 1 Cor. 1:17, 18.

Whenever the Church has been weak it has always been at times when there has been a neglect of the preaching ministry.

But it is not just preaching as such that we must be concerned about. True Biblical preaching pays particular attention to

- B. The message that is preached.

See v. 2 for the message. See also vv. 8-12. See the emphasis on "the name of Jesus" in v. 18. We must preach what the Apostles preached if we want to see the

blessing which they experienced!

But then notice another thing about their preaching. It has to do with

C. How they preached.

They preached boldly, fearlessly, effectively, incessantly, openly!

The pressure was on them to stop it altogether, but they could not stop. Do we know the compulsion expressed in v. 20?

Cf. Jer. 20:9.

To preach boldly actually means that they did not hold a single thing back, they told everything that they were commissioned to tell. Cf. Paul in Acts 20:20.

Concl: What a challenge this should be to us -- to see the men that God uses, the emphasis on their message, the Lord's care over them in trouble, and the blessing that accompanied the preaching of the Word of God.

But where does it all start? By being with the Lord Jesus. Nothing can compensate for this. If we are to work effectively as His servants, we must be with Him -- learning from Him, listening to Him, worshipping Him, and going forth in obedience to preach Him in the power of the Holy Spirit.

God's ways have not changed. This is the way to blessing and the way to see people turned to the Lord forever!

A PRAYER MEETING
Acts 4:23-37

Intro: At the present time we are going through the book of Acts in our morning services. Usually I would turn aside from such a series as this on Easter Sunday to speak about the resurrection of Christ. But there is really no need to change when you are in the book of Acts because no book of the Bible has any more to say about Christ's resurrection than does this book! This was the theme of the messages that the Apostles preached. It is this truth that is at the heart of the Gospel. It is stated very clearly in verse 33 of our text. So there is really no need for me to leave my present series in order to speak about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Let us see how it came up.

The Apostles (Peter and John) had had their first taste of opposition since the ascension of the Lord Jesus. They had spent a night in jail, had appeared for trial before the Sanhedrin, and the decision had been that they were not "to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18b).

After their release, the Apostles had gone back to the people of the Jerusalem church, and that is where our text for today picks up the story. It begins with

I. THE REPORT OF PETER AND JOHN (Acts 4:23).

Luke's account here is very brief, but it must have taken some time to tell "all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them."

This undoubtedly included also all that Peter and John had said to the chief priests and elders.

There was no doubt but that a very serious situation had developed -- and that it was going to get worse (as it did)! The highest Jewish authority had issued their ultimatum: You are never again to speak or teach anything that has to do with Jesus Christ! That would not affect the preaching of many preachers because they never talk about the Lord anyway, but that would have put an end to all of the preaching of the Apostles because they did not preach about anybody but the Lord!

So they were faced with a problem: Would they obey the Sanhedrin, or would they obey the Lord? He had said, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me," but the Sanhedrin had said that this kind of preaching had to stop! What would they do?

It was no difficult for them to answer. They had only one

course that they could take: They must obey the Lord -- and they had told the Sanhedrin what they would do!

However, it is evident that they did not take the warning lightly, nor did the church receive it as though it were an insignificant thing because the next thing we see is

II. THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH (Acts 4:24-30).

Now we have come again this morning to two of the outstanding characteristics of the early church: they preached the Word of God, and they prayed!

We saw that they prayed in chapter 1 when they were about to replace Judas.

In chapter 2, verse 42, we read that "they continued steadfastly . . . in prayers."

A major part of their praying was praise!

They prayed because they needed guidance. They prayed because they needed the Lord's help and blessing. Every true child of God will pray. About the first thing that was said of the Apostle Paul after he was saved was, "Behold, he prayeth" (Acts 9:11). This was the way Ananias was to identify him.

So here, after the church heard the Apostles' report, it was evident to all that they needed to pray. But how did they pray? What did they pray for? Let us examine the prayer to see what we can learn for the benefit of our own prayer life.

Notice, as we begin to look at their prayer, that we do not get to any request until we come to the last two verses -- 29, 30.

The first part of the prayer has to do with God:

- 1) Who He is.
- 2) What He has done.
- 3) What He has said.
- 4) His overruling sovereignty.

A. They began with God.

1. Who is He? What was He to them?

They speak of three things:

- a. He is Lord -- Despot. This is not a word to be feared when you apply it to God. It is a word willed with comfort and hope. It means that He

owned them, absolutely, and that He possessed "uncontrolled power" (Thayer, p. 130). The Sanhedrin had spoken as though they were running things, but they weren't! God was! And God had the right to do with His people as He wanted to do!

- b. He is God. Let your mind take this in. Say it over and over, if you need to. "Thou art God"! The men of the Sanhedrin were not to be despised, but, remember, they were just men! God is the only One Who is God!

Now let me combine the third thing that they had to say about God with

2. What He had done.

He has "made heaven,
and earth,
and the sea,
and all that in them is!"
The church prayed like the OT saints so often, prayed -- recognizing God has Creator!

This, too, speaks of His power, but it also speaks of the fact that God is a God of purpose. He did not create the world just because He had nothing else to do, but there were great, eternal issues involved in His creative work -- purposes that touched the lives of all of those in the early church, and purposes that touch each of our lives.

You can see how much we have been robbed of in these days when we see everywhere the denial of God as the Creator. You see it everywhere in the Word, and it is a vital part of our praying to recognize that God is our Creator, and that His power remains the same, and our circumstances have not changed His purposes!

But then the church does another very significant thing. They recognize

3. What He has said.

You and I will never be able to pray correctly and effectively as long as we ignore the Word of God.

What did they learn from Scripture?

Why they learned that what was happening was what God had said in His Word they should expect to happen. One thousand years before the Spirit of God

had indicated through David in the second Psalm that kings, rulers, and people, Jews and Gentiles, everybody would rise up as one mighty force "against the Lord, and against his Christ"!

They could hardly agree on anything else, BUT THEY WERE IN SOLID AGREEMENT ON THIS POINT -- and they still are!

See how the people recognize the truth of God's Word in v. 27.

But wait! The best, and the most amazing, is yet to be said. And it has to do with

4. The overruling sovereignty, the providence of God: "For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:28).

The Lord had been at work through the godless actions of men at the Cross, and He was still working. The very fact that the church was praying was evidence of how God was using this opposition to accomplish His own purposes.

All of these things had a profound effect upon

B. Their request.

They did not ask for the difficulty to be removed. They did not pray that they would have no more trials. That would have meant that the Word needed to be changed, and it would also have meant that the world needed to be changed. The world is not going to be changed in that way; it is passing away. It is under the judgment of God.

But what did they pray?

THEY PRAYED FOR BOLDNESS TO SPEAK THE WORD WITH THE BLESSING OF GOD ATTENDING THEIR MINISTRY.

(Comment on the word, "boldness.")

This is what we need at Trinity Bible Church. There are those who say that when you talk about the sovereignty of God, when you teach election, when you emphasize that God is doing a work that has been ordained from eternity past, that you are going to become ingrown, that you will kill any evangelism, that such a church will die.

Let me say just the opposite this morning. The church is fat and flabby and weak and worldly today because we have ignored the fact that our God is sovereign, that He does have a plan, that He is saving those He chooses to save, and that He is accomplishing His eternal purposes in His way for His own glory. And all of the opposition that is directed against His church only helps to fulfill His will!

I trust that you see all of this in the Word of God this morning. We have every reason to be encouraged, and every reason to pray in faith that the Lord will stand behind us today as He did 2,000 years ago with His people when they cried to Him for His blessing.

Now let us take a brief look at

III. THE GOD-GIVEN RESULTS -- THE ANSWER TO THEIR PRAYER (Acts 4:31-37).

- A. First, The Lord gave them a special indication that He had heard, and that He was there: "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together" (v. 31a).

Perhaps He will give us a token of His blessing today.

- B. Second, "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 31m).
- C. Third, "they spoke the word of God with boldness" (v. 31b).

Note what they spoke, and how!

- D. Fourth, there was an inner work done in all of their hearts, making them "of one heart and of one soul." See v. 32a.

And for the thousands of believers, this was truly amazing!

- E. Finally, there was an outward manifestation of that oneness in the generosity that prevailed, the love that they showed for each other: "and great grace was upon them all" (v. 33b).

It does not mean that everybody sold everything, nor even that everybody took part in this. Perhaps Barnabas is mentioned because of the exceptional gift that he made. But it does mean that there was such a spirit of love and generosity that no one went without the supply

their needs. It was all done "decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40).

Concl: What a message there is for us in this passage! Let me just mention four things as I close:

- 1) We must not be discouraged by criticism and opposition. In fact, we ought to expect it and be encouraged by it. It is one proof that we are on the right track.
- 2) We must pray. This is one reason for our trials -- to make us know how dependent we are upon the Lord.
- 3) We must not hold back any part of the truth. We must continue personally and as a church to declare all of the truth of God. It makes no difference whether men like it or not; we have a charge to keep, and a God to glorify!
- 4) Let us look for and expect the blessing of God. The truth has been buried long enough. Our God is sovereign. He is at work, and He is invincible. We are on the winning side. Let us go forth in the victory that is ours because our Saviour is a living Saviour, the One Who has conquered sin and death and the grave and the world and Satan.

Conclude with the words of We Rest On Thee, Our Shield and Our Defender (IVCF Hymns, #9)..

If time permits, sing #579 in the Trinity Hymnal to the tune of Finlandia: Be Still, My Soul. ^

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA
or
THE CHURCH'S FIRST HYPOCRITES
Acts 5:1-11

Intro: Sometimes it is hard to get a subject that will really describe the main theme of a passage. But there are many that we could choose for this passage. Either of the two given above would do -- or we could call this

SIN UNTO DEATH

or we could give it the title

SATAN'S FIRST ATTACK AGAINST THE INFANT CHURCH

This was definitely a first --

THE FIRST EVIDENCE OF TROUBLE WITHIN

Trouble had appeared from without, in the form of persecution, but that only strengthened the Church. This is another matter.

Calvin says that up to this point it was as though Luke was writing about a company of angels instead of a company of men, but now that is all changed. GOD'S HAND OF JUDGMENT falls upon His people. We are to learn that Satan is not asleep. As the adversary of God and His people, He attacks the Church in a most subtle way. How important it is for us to understand this passage and to see the message that it has for us today!

Those of us who are a part of Trinity Bible Church, this new work which we believe God has raised up, have great cause to be interested in a passage like this. Satan is not going to leave us alone. He obviously hates the doctrines which exalt God's sovereign grace as he hates any and everything that has to do with the glory of God. So we can expect trouble. And the most subtle trouble, the trouble that will cause the most serious consequences, is the trouble that will arise from within! Trouble from without tends to drive us together and to strengthen us, but trouble from within tends to divide and weaken us. Satan knows this. He has many methods that he employs. Sometimes he appears as "a roaring lion" (1 Pet. 5:8); sometimes as "an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). In other words, sometimes he shows himself as an enemy, sometimes as a friend. The latter is by far the most dangerous for us, because, regardless of how he comes, he is always Satan, he is always our enemy, our adversary, and his intention is always to destroy any work of God and he will use any means that he has to to accomplish his purpose.

Let me illustrate how careful we need to be and where we need to be careful from some reading that I have been doing this past week.

A few weeks ago I mentioned to you that I had heard that Dr.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones had died. Since then that unwelcome news has been confirmed from several sources. I have in my hand a paper which I recently subscribed to, printed in England, and this whole issue has been devoted to Dr. Lloyd-Jones in honor of the long and fruitful ministry the Lord gave him. It says that he was "called to glory on March 1st" of this year! A few years ago I wrote to Dr. Lloyd-Jones trying to get him to come to Portland. He was unable to come then because of surgery that he was going to have, but he expressed the hope that he might be able to come later. As you know, he never did -- and now he never will! We must accept that as the will of God.

But I have a special reason for mentioning him. His books have been a special blessing to me. Some of his titles are:

- 1) Spiritual Depression -- Its Cause and Cure.
- 2) The Plight of Man and the Power of God.
- 3) A commentary of several volumes on Ephesians.
- 4) A commentary of several volumes on Romans.

And he wrote other books and many, many articles.

But he also did a lot of reading, and it was not uncommon to find his name attacked to some of the Puritan writers or Reformed writers of the past. Dr. Lloyd-Jones was a thorough-going Calvinist, and he loved to proclaim the doctrines of grace.

One writer he recommended was a Puritan by the name of Richard Sibbes. I had never heard of Mr. Sibbes myself until just a few years ago when largely because of Dr. Lloyd-Jones' recommendation I picked up the first volume of reprints of Mr. Sibbes' writings which was issued by Banner of Truth. This volume contained two messages by Mr. Sibbes which Dr. Lloyd-Jones mentioned in particular: The Bruised Reed and The Soul's Conflict. This is what Dr. Lloyd-Jones wrote about them:

I will never cease to be grateful to Richard Sibbes who was balm to my soul at a period in my life when I was overworked and badly overtired . . . his books The Bruised Reed and The Soul's Conflict quietened, soothed, comforted, encouraged and healed me . . .

This week I have been reading The Bruised Reed. He dedicated it to a prominent British military man who lived back in the 1600's when this message was first preached. In that dedication Richard Sibbes mentioned three things which the Lord's people need to be constantly concerned about, and yet he indicated at the same time that we can so focus on one that we neglect the others. And this is when we open the door to Satan.

The three things are:

- 1) Victory.
- 2) Truth.
- 3) Goodness.

Let me give you three other words which I believe that Mr. Sibbes

could also have used, words which mean the same:

- 1) Blessing.
- 2) The preaching of the Word.
- 3) Holiness.

We believe that the Lord has brought us together for the proclamation of truths which the Church has been neglecting in recent years, the doctrines of God's divine and sovereign grace. And we are expecting and praying for blessing. We want to see great victories which in the past have accompanied the preaching of the whole counsel of God. BUT -- are we just as concerned about Mr. Sibbes' third point: "goodness" in our lives, holiness of life? Are we in danger of overlooking the fact that blessing only comes through the preaching of the Word when the Lord's people are just as concerned about personal holiness as they are about blessing and about true, Biblical preaching?

This is where Ananias and Sapphira made their tragic mistake. They forgot about holiness! Actually, they forgot about God! They forgot (if they ever knew) what the Lord told Samuel when Samuel went to the home of Jesse to anoint a king for Israel -- that "the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7b).

Ananias and Sapphira needed the truth of Heb. 4:13,

Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his (God's) sight: but all things are anked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

They had become like the scribes and Pharisees who did their works "to be seen of men" (Matt. 23:5a).

Now let us look at the text to see how all of this came about.

Vv. 1, 2 tell us what they did, and then
vv. 3-6 refer especially to Ananias, while
vv. 7-11 refer especially to Sapphira.

Let us ask, first of all,

I. WHEN DID IT HAPPEN?

Actually chapter 5 is a continuation of chapter 4 and the events that are described at the end of that chapter. All of this happened when the Church was at the height of its blessing. See Acts 4:33 -- and then the verses that follow to the end of chapter 4. They were seeing victory on all sides, within the Church and without, as the Word was being preached. Love was evident everywhere -- love for the Lord and love for the Lord's people! A spontaneous movement had been started in the hearts of the people (not ~~commanded~~ by

the Apostles) so that the saints were selling their lands and houses and bringing the money to the Apostles. This is where we first meet Barnabas.

Thus, it is important to see that this first real trouble within the Church came about over money!

Cf. 1 Tim. 6:10.

And note that although they were not together from v. 3 on, yet vv. 1, 2 indicate that

- 1) They both came with their money, and
- 2) They were careful to see that they "laid it at the apostles' feet."

But now let us make sure that we understand

II. THE PROBLEM.

Two things are obvious:

- 1) They did not have to bring anything. This is apparent from Peter's words in v. 4.

But notice this also:

- 2) They did not really want to bring anything! They felt pressured to act like the other believers were acting, to give some evidence that they loved the Lord, and that they were willing to sacrifice for His people. But they refused to face the fact that things were not right in their hearts!

Consequently they were hypocrites -- which is the Greek word for an actor, a stage-player, one who pretends to be somebody when he is actually another person!

Long before this Solomon had written a word that should be inscribed in the memory of every child of God:

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23).

And about ~~400 years~~ later the Lord said to Jeremiah,

The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately wicked: who can know it? (Jer. 17:19).

A person who is a complete hypocrite cannot be a true child of God, but that is not our problem that we are concerned about just now. We need to be concerned about certain areas in our lives where we may be hypocrites.

Do you pretend to love the Lord more than you actually do? Are there sins in your life, ways in which you are flirting with sin, things you read, or possibly pictures that you look at, or attitudes that you harbor, secret sins you indulge in -- things which you are tolerating, but have

never actually faced? Do you pray in public, but not in private? Parents, would you punish your children for things that you do yourself? Do you pretend to be humble when actually your heart is full of pride?

Maybe I haven't touched on the thing that is your problem, but just as the Lord enable Peter to know the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira, so you know if there are ways in which you are just acting a part!

Let me point out another thing from our text:

III. THE UNVEILING OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA'S SIN.

The Lord knew what was going on, and He revealed it to Peter. We never hide anything from the Lord. Read Psalm 139 if you are in doubt.

Remember how Moses warned the 2½ tribes of what would happen if they went back on their promise to the other 9½ tribes? "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23b). It always does!

Look at the questions that Peter asked:

1) First, to Ananias in v. 3.

2) Then, to Sapphira in v. 9.

"Why?" means two things at least:

1) How could Satan do such a thing?

2) What do you think was his reason for doing this?

You see, even though Ananias and Sapphira were fully responsible for their sins, yet Satan was at the foundation of it all. He deceives us into thinking that God does not know, or that He won't do anything about it anyway -- and so we go on.

But look!

IV. THE HAND OF DIVINE JUDGMENT.

Both Ananias and Sapphira had sinned unto death! See vv. 5a and 9b, 10.

Look at Phil. 1:6 in this light. The Lord will not let His own people continue to act a part. He will deal with us so that our inner man and our outward behavior agree with each other. There is nothing that is more discouraging for people to find out than to discover that we are different inwardly from what we are outwardly.

We all have this problem. It is apparent from Genesis 3 on that sin has made us all hypocrites to some extent. May the Lord, in the words of the Puritan, Richard Sibbes, make us

just as concerned about being holy as we are to see His blessing and to preach His Word!

What were

V. THE RESULTS?

See vv. 5b and 11.

Don't say that the fear of the Lord is just OT truth! If you think that obedience to the Lord is just optional, and that the Lord will tolerate our hypocrisies, just read 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 and note also Eph. 5:21.

It is still true that

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom:
and the knowledge of the holy is understanding
(Prov. 9:10).

Concl: I trust that we will always be a people who will accept nothing from the pulpit of Trinity Bible Church but the solid preaching of the Word of God, and that we will always be crying out to God for greater and greater blessing, BUT I TRUST THAT YOU AND I, ALL OF US, WILL ALWAYS BE KNOWN AS PEOPLE WHO ARE EQUALLY INTERESTED IN HOLINESS OF HEART AND LIFE, and that the Lord will never let the charge of hypocrisy to be laid against us.

Let our prayer be each day Psalms 139:23, 24 and Psalm 19:14.

MEN AGAINST GOD
Acts 5:12-42

Intro: From the very beginning of the Church the preaching of the Gospel has been risky business. The New Testament will bear that out.

This past week I bought a book which has the stories of several of the Lord's servants from the past. Some of the chapter headings read like this:

John Rogers: martyr

John Hooper: bishop and martyr

Rowland Taylor: martyr

Hugh Latimer: bishop and martyr

John Bradford: martyr

Nicholas Ridley: bishop and martyr

(Ryle's Light from Old Times)

Of course, hundreds upon hundreds of names could be added to that list plus the many who have suffered in various ways for the Gospel. John Bunyan, for example, spent 12 years in jail because he refused to ~~stop~~ preaching the Gospel.

However, this kind of treatment of the Lord's people did not start with the Church. When the Lord was denouncing the scribes and the Pharisees in Matthew 23, He spoke of Jerusalem in these words:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets,
and stonest them which are sent unto thee, . . .

Such treatment was not unexpected by the Apostles. In the Upper Room the Lord had said to them,

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. . . . If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; . . . These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service (John 15:18, 20m; 16:1, 2).

As we come to Acts 5 we have had no martyrs, but we will have one in chapter 7: Stephen! But even in chapter 5 we can see the handwriting on the wall.

One thing that is obvious as we study the opposition and persecution that the Lord and His servants have faced is that it has most frequently come from those who professed to believe in God, and many times from those who claimed to be followers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is very true that "the blood of the martyrs has become the seed of the Church"! Even this saying which is often quoted expresses the fact that, with all of the opposition, there has

side to the history of the Lord's work, apparent in this chapter, which we cannot overlook. It is that all of the persecution and even martyrdom has not stopped the Lord's work; in fact, it has often flourished the most when the fires of persecution have been the hottest!

If there are two verses in our text this morning which seem to sum up the outstanding fact about the Lord's work, they are vv. 38, 39 -- the well-known words of Gamaliel, words which have been interpreted in a variety of ways, and yet words which stand in Scripture as a tremendous testimony to the sovereignty of God in His work. Let me read them again:

And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let the alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

The NASB renders that latter part, "or else you may even be found fighting against God"!

MEN AGAINST GOD! What kind of success have they had? How have men fared who have dared to stand against God? Let us begin by examining our text in Acts 5.

Let us note, first of all,

I. THE CONTENT OF THIS LENGTHY PASSAGE.

We can briefly summarize it in the following words:

- 1) The Apostles' miracles.
- 2) The additions to the Church.
- 3) The Apostles imprisoned.
- 4) Their release by an angel!
- 5) The Apostles teaching "in the temple."
- 6) They are apprehended again.
- 7) Their statement to the Jewish officials.
- 8) Gamaliel's famous statement.
- 9) The Apostles beaten.
- 10) The Apostles' joy.
- 11) Their daily teaching and preaching "in the temple."

It is really an amazing story, isn't it? The opposition was growing, but the work of the Lord was not only continuing; it was enjoying great blessing. History was being repeated. Men were taking their stand against God (not just against His people, or His servants), and it is evident that they, the men, were losing the battle.

Now I want to do a second thing in connection with this passage. I want to answer this question: WHAT EVIDENCE WAS THERE THAT THE JEWS WERE FIGHTING AGAINST GOD, AND NOT JUST AGAINST ANOTHER GROUP OF MEN WHO CLAIMED TO BE THE SERVANTS OF GOD?

Let us note:

II. THE EVIDENCE THAT THIS WAS A WORK OF GOD.

This is very easy to prove.

A. By the miracles (Acts 5:12a, 15, 16).

One miracle in Acts 3 had thrown Jerusalem into great turmoil, but look at these verses and see what was happening now! Hundreds were being healed! In fact, every sick person who was brought to the Apostles went away well!

Somebody needed to remember those words of another famous Jew, Nicodemus in John 3:2, who said,
 Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

This was the first evidence that God was at work.

B. By the multitudes who were being "added to the Lord" (Acts 5:14).

What an unusual expression this is! They were not just joining the Jerusalem church; they were being "added to the Lord"! Lives were being changed. Trophies of grace were being won. It was very evident that God was at work.

This is the greatest miracle of all. This is why Paul could write the tremendous statement that we have in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed . . ."

But notice a third evidence:

C. By the work and the words of "the angel of the Lord" (Acts 5:19, 20).

This happened again to Peter in Acts 12, but it had not happened before this instance in Acts 5! And it certainly did not happen every day even then!

Read Acts 5:23. How foolish the keepers of the prison must have felt! The greatest security of men is really no security at all! God was at work!

We also see evidence that the Lord was at work in several things that happened to the Apostles, or in several things that they did.

D. By what the Apostles did after they were released.

What would you have done? Would you have gone right back to the temple? See Acts 5:21a. This was not the normal thing to expect from the Apostles, and the fact that they did it is evidence of what God was doing in their hearts. The grace of God was upon them!

See also further evidence

- E. By the boldness with which the Apostles answered their Jewish opponents in Acts 5:29-32.

It took more than human courage to do this. See Acts 4:29.

Couple this with the content of their message:

- F. By what they said when they spoke -- in Acts 5:29-32.

Why were they preaching, and why did God raise and exalt the Lord Jesus? It was not that He might destroy His enemies, but "to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins."

The Apostles knew that people do not see things for themselves, and then repent. They only repent when God gives them repentance and faith. Cf. 2 Tim. 2:24-26.

We also see the evidence of God's work

- G. By Gamaliel's intervention (Acts 5:34-40) -- plus the fact that the other Jews "agreed" with Gamaliel (see v. 40a).

This did not just happen. This was not just a lucky turn of events. This was what God did!

Two more things show the hand of the God.

- H. By the attitude of the Apostles toward the Jews in connection with the beating that they received (Acts 5:41).

A person has to be very hardened to the work of the Lord not to be able to see the hand of God in this.

But note also:

- I. By what they did every day after that (Acts 5:42).

This was either the work of God, or a lot of foolishness on the part of the Apostles. It had to be the former. Their obedience was prompted only by God's work in their hearts.

Be sure to notice, too, that it was not just that they taught and preached, but that they taught and preached CHRIST!

This is what brought the blessing of God.

All of this is tremendously encouraging, isn't it? And yet I want you to notice finally this morning that the emphasis of Acts 5 is

III. A TESTIMONY THAT IS CONFIRMED BY ALL OF SCRIPTURE.

My subject this morning could be descriptive not only of all of Scripture, but of all human history: **MEN AGAINST GOD!** But it is equally true that all of Scripture and all of human history bear testimony to the sovereignty of God in overruling the opposition of men as He fully accomplishes His purposes.

Before I illustrate this from Scripture, let me tell you about a card I received at Easter -- sent by a man who attends our Tuesday Bible Class. It was an Easter greeting, with a Scripture verse on the front and only a brief message on the inside. In fact, it was very brief. Right in the middle of the card on the inside were two references:

- 1) Isa. 52:7.
- 2) Rom. 10:15.

When I looked them up I found that Rom. 10:15 is a NT quotation of Isa. 52:7 -- and that Isa. 52:7 is a verse for all who preach! I had read it many times before, but I noticed something about it that I had never noticed before, to my knowledge. This is the verse:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him
that bringeth good tidings,
that publisheth peace;
that bringeth good tidings of good,
that publisheth salvation;
and then the latter part of the verse really struck me --
that saith unto Zion (the people of God),
THY GOD REIGNETH!

This is what salvation is all about! This is what brings peace! This is good news, good tidings of good! "THY GOD REIGNETH!" And a preacher is failing in his mission if this is not his message -- "Thy God reigneth!"

Let me remind you of just a few who learned this in Scripture, who found that when men are against God they are fighting a losing battle.

A. Joseph's brothers. Cf. Joseph's words in Gen. 50:20,
But as for you, ye thought evil against me:

but God meant it unto good . . . to save much people alive.

B. Pharaoh and his persecution of Israel.

Cf. Ex. 1:12,

But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew.

C. Balaam -- when Balak wanted him to curse Israel.

Cf. Num. 23:20,

Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he (God) hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it.

D. Several from the book of Daniel:

1. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace (Dan. 3).
2. Daniel himself in the lions' den (Dan. 6) -- " . . . no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God."
3. Nebuchadnezzar after the Lord had humbled him by making him eat grass like oxen, etc.

Cf. Dan. 4:35,

And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

E. In the NT -- Judas, Herod, Pilate, the Sanhedrin, etc.

This is only a small part of the evidence that we have in Scripture.

Add to these

F. Some of the promises of Scripture of the overruling hand of God in the lives of His people.

1. Rom. 8:28, 31, 37, 38-39.
2. John 10:28-30, "My sheep hear my voice . . ."
3. 2 Cor. 2:14, "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph . . ."

4. Isa. 54:17,

No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.

5. Isa. 41:10, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee . . ."

But never is it more evident in Scripture than in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ.

G. The hand of God in the life of our Saviour.

1. Phil. 2:5-11.

2. Acts 2:22-24; 3:14, 15; 4:10; 5:30, 31.

Concl: Men against God? Yes, history is full of them -- but not one has ever succeeded. The people of God might be weaker, and terribly outnumbered, but God has never once failed them. Ask Goliath (1 Sam. 17). Ask Sennacherib (2 Kings 19). In the days to come you will be able to ask the beast and the 10 kings who will be with him. What will happen?

These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is the Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

I want to be a preacher with beautiful feet, and so I am saying from Acts 5 this morning, and from all of the Word of God, "THY GOD REIGNETH!" Let us trust Him, Let us glorify Him. Let us proclaim His Word. And let us expect His blessing.

THE APOSTLES' PATTERN OF MINISTRY
or
THE WORK OF THE PASTOR
Acts 6:1-7

Intro: Two times in our text it is emphasized that the Church was growing numerically -- in v. 1, and again in v. 7. This is the purpose of God for His Church; it should always be growing.

But it is evident also from our text that the spiritual growth was not keeping pace with the numerical growth. If this condition were not corrected, it would put a stop to the numerical growth!

Note that it was the numerical growth that caused the spiritual problem. So the Church must always anticipate this in times of blessing -- and its leaders must be prepared to take the necessary steps to correct the problems.

V. 7 makes it clear that the problem was settled in a way that pleased the Lord so that the blessing not only continued, but it increased. Even more than that, it so increased that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." "The priests were not only a very powerful group, but they were also the principal enemies of the Church. They were reached by the truth of the Word ("the faith") and so this indicated several things:

- 1) That the Lord was pleased with His people -- the way the work was being done.
- 2) That the Lord will overcome any obstacle when His work is being done His way.
- 3) That His grace is irresistible! No man can stand against God. And it is to His greater glory to reach the people whom we believe are hopeless!

This leads us to ask the question: WHAT DID THE EARLY CHURCH DO THAT BROUGHT SUCH BLESSING? We need to know the answer, not just to satisfy our curiosity, but so that we will be following in the path of blessing ourselves. Blessings do not just come; they come as the consequence of pleasing the Lord. Thus, this is a very important passage for all who are concerned about the blessing of God.

The Apostles have set the pattern for us. Let me point out at least 4 significant things.

I. THE APOSTLES BELIEVED THAT THE PEOPLE OF GOD SHOULD BE TAKEN CARE OF.

The situation over which this problem arose had been going on since Pentecost in Acts 2. From the first the people of God had been carrying for the needy. There was much evidence of

obedience to the first two commandments. When you find a true love for God you will also find a true love for the people of God.

But, as the Church grew, and as you looked at the kinds of people who were being saved, you could predict that there was going to be trouble! The Devil is always ready to take advantage of any situation that he can when the blessing of God is upon the people of God.

It had to do with the two kinds of Jews that there were: "Grecians" and "Hebrews." It is important for us to know what Luke is writing about. (Cf. Alford, II, 61.)

1) The "Grecians" were Hellenists, Jews who spoke Greek and who were inclined to use the LXX -- the Greek translation of the OT.

2) The "Hebrews" were pure Jews in the twofold sense that they spoke Hebrew, and used the Hebrew Scriptures.

These two groups were at odds with each other before they were saved, and so it was possible that the trouble would continue afterwards. And it did!

Now the important thing for us to see is this: THE APOSTLES WERE DIRECTED IN WHAT THEY DID BY THE CONVICTION THAT IT WAS PLEASING TO THE LORD FOR THE CHURCH TO CONTINUE TO CARE FOR THOSE WHO WERE NEEDY. Let us have no question about that today.

Cf. 1 John 3:16, 17. See also James 2:15, 16.

So we must do the same. We are not a social organization for the world, but we are to care for those of our number who are in need. This pleases God.

But this leads to my second point.

Because the Apostles were convinced that this was pleasing to the Lord,

II. THE APOSTLES BELIEVED THAT WHEN PROBLEMS ARISE IN DOING THE WILL OF GOD, THOSE PROBLEMS MUST BE SOLVED.

After all, it would have been the easiest just to discontinue that whole phase of their ministry. If it is going to cause problems, let's quit it -- could have been their attitude.

But they did not handle it that way!

Problems that are not settled, that may be ignored, do not tend to go away. They tend to get worse, and, as Calvin wrote, every unattended problem becomes "a wound hard to be cured" (XVIII, 232).

And it is significant that the Apostles were the ones who took the initiative in getting this problem solved. They did not leave it up to the "Grecians" and the "Hebrews." Nor did they look to the people. They took it on themselves.

The quickest way to have handled it would have been to take the responsibility on themselves. But they rejected this saying, "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables."

"Not reason" means not pleasing, that is, not pleasing to us, nor is it pleasing to the Lord. This was not the way to settle the problem, according to their understanding of their own calling from the Lord. There was nothing wrong with the work. It would not have been below them. But it simply was not the work that the Lord had given them to do.

Thinking of the work of a pastor -- how important it is for a pastor to know what his work is. The ministry today has suffered (as apparently it always has) because the pastor has felt it was his job to do everything! And the Church has encouraged this. But let us learn a very important lesson from the Apostles.

It was not their job to serve tables. There are lots of things that a pastor should not do in the work of the local church. But notice now this third very important principle:

III. THE APOSTLES BELIEVED THAT EVERY PART OF THE LORD'S WORK SHOULD BE CARRIED ON BY GODLY, HOLY, SPIRITUALLY-MINDED PEOPLE.

Look at v. 3.

Note: "seven men." And this was the case even though the Church numbered in the thousands! What does it mean? It means that, the more godly the Lord's servants are, the less it takes to get the job done. Our vast organizations are an indication that in many, many cases we have the wrong kind of people doing the work -- sometimes people who do not even know the Lord (and experience has proved this)!

See the qualifications (as a sample) in v. 3, and then notice what is said about Stephen in v. 5 (proving that the qualifications in v. 3 can be enlarged upon to include all of the works and gifts of the Spirit of God!

Spurgeon said two things about this point that are very important:

- 1) One, " . . . if the report of our character be bad, it is all over with our testimony" (XIV, 173).
- 2) The second, " . . . the followers of the early Reformers

were distinguished by the sanctity of their lives" (Ibid.).

It has often been remarked that when you look in Scripture at the qualifications for elders, and then look at the qualifications for deacons, there is very little difference! And the same is true for any other ministry. These qualifications are set for the leaders because, among other things, they are to set the example for what all of the people of God should be!

Let us never forget this.

But let me go on to my last point.

Do you want to know what the Apostles considered their work to be? And do you want to know what the work of the pastor is? Then look at v. 4, and notice this fourth principle:

IV. THE APOSTLES BELIEVED THAT THEIR WORK WAS TO PRAY, AND TO MINISTER THE WORD.

I wish that all of you could read what John Owen, one of the outstanding Puritan leaders, has written in Vol. 16 of his works concerning The Especial Duty of Pastors of Churches. He lived and ministered in England and Great Britain in the 1600's (1616-1683).

Until you can read it, let me give you an abbreviated form of what he wrote.

The first thing he says about a pastor and his work is this: "The first and principal duty of a pastor is to feed the flock by diligent preaching of the word" (XVI, 74).

The second is this: "The second duty of a pastor towards his flock is continual fervent prayer for them" (XVI, 77).

In connection with the first he says, ". . . he who doth not, or can not, or will not feed the flock is no pastor . . ." (XVI, 75). He reminds us that as far back as Jeremiah's day the Lord had promised,

And I will give you pastors according to mine heart,
which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding"
(Jer. 3:15).

When Owen speaks of prayer, he reminds us of men of God in Scripture who are remembered for their praying, such as, Moses, and ~~Samuel~~, and Paul. We have the greatest Example of all in our Lord. Cf. John 17; Heb. 4:14-16. Note how Samuel's words in 1 Sam. 12:23 harmonize perfectly with Acts 6:4.

A pastor does not give himself to his work, attaching himself to it, and separating himself from everything that would hinder him in his work, just for the benefit of his people, but he does it for the nourishment of his own soul. His strongest preaching should be to himself. It is doubtful if his preaching will affect anyone else if it does not profoundly move him and change his life.

And he needs the wisdom of the Word in order to exercise his pastoral duties as he should.

And then it is the Word that he needs to give to his people.

Why should he pray? How can he learn to pray?

His praying will manifest his dependence upon God -- his recognition that he is not sufficient for the work that he has to do -- that only God can use the Word to save and to transform those who hear him.

He learns to pray by studying the prayers of Scripture, and by getting acquainted with his people. He learns to pray as he prays for himself and learns how the Lord meets his own needs.

What a difference it would make in the ministry today if those of us who preach would follow the example of our predecessors in giving ourselves "to prayer, and to the ministry of the word"!

Concl: Is it any wonder that we read what we do in v. 7? Do you believe that, if we take The Apostles' Pattern For Ministry as our pattern, we could see similar blessing today? Surely that is one reason that it is here in Acts 6.

I trust you are praying for revival and for a spiritual awakening in our day. Let us pray for a mighty moving of the Spirit. But, let us remember as we pray that there are conditions to God's blessing, conditions that are fully revealed in the Word. And that when, by God's grace and power in all of our lives, those conditions are met, the blessing will come.

Let us live and pray and work that it may be so!

A SAINT UNDER FIRE
Acts 6:8-15

Intro: Our Lord, at one point toward the close of His public ministry, said this:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets,
and stonest them which are sent unto thee . . .
(Matt. 23:37).

The story of Stephen which we come to today in our study of the book of Acts clearly shows us that Jerusalem had not changed! Stephen was to join that long line of saints who, under fire, had laid down their lives for the sake of the Gospel.

Recently our newspapers have been telling us each day of the deaths of hunger-strikers in northern Ireland who have died for the cause they support. They are martyrs for things that they believe in. However, they have taken their own lives, and they have been men who have resorted to violence and to crime to accomplish their goals.

It is really not right to mention Stephen with them because Stephen was not a criminal, and he did not take his own life! We could speak of Stephen as John Owen, the Puritan, used to speak of him, as "Holy Stephen." His enemies tried to lay all kinds of false charges at his feet, but they were false charges. Stephen was like his Lord

Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth;
Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again;
when he suffered, he threatened not;
but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously
(1 Pet. 2:22, 23).

Thus, while Stephen was not sinless, yet he was following the example of the Lord Jesus, as Peter teaches us we all should do, even if it leads to death, as it did in the case of our Lord.

Stephen was the first martyr of the early Church.

It all seems like such a waste of life until we look beyond the immediate circumstances given to us in Acts 6 and 7 to see one of the things that God was doing at this time. In the latter part of Acts 7:58 we read,

. . . and the witnesses (i.e., those who stoned Stephen)
laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose
name was Saul.

This is the first time in Scripture that we read about Saul, Saul of Tarsus. But everyone who has read the Scriptures knows that this was that young, ambitious Jew, who at this time also hated Christ and the Gospel, but who later was saved, and who became one of the mightiest, if not the mightiest, preacher of the Gospel that the world has ever seen! Tradition tells us that Saul, who later was named, Paul, the Apostle Paul, also became a martyr. Listen to Paul's own testimony which he gave many years

later, in this same city of Jerusalem, and before another group of angry Jews, who wanted to kill Paul as they had killed Stephen. Here are Paul's words, found in Acts 22:19, 20, where he is telling how he spoke to the Lord when the Lord appeared to him in the Temple. Listen to his confession:

And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee:

And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed,
I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death,
and kept the raiment of them that slew him.

A moment ago I read from Matthew 22, giving you our Lord's words about the martyrs of the Old Testament. Let me point out one part of that statement which certainly applies to the circumstances which led to Stephen's death as well. It is this:

" . . . and stonest them which are sent unto thee . . . " Those who had died in Jerusalem in years past were not there by their own choice. They had been "sent," sent by God! And even though they had been killed, as Stephen was to be killed, yet God was providentially behind it all, using the wrath of men to praise him, and making the blood of a martyr the means for the advance, not the defeat, of the Gospel witness.

When you read Acts 6 and 7, remember that Saul of Tarsus was there!

But let us think now about the events recorded at the end of Acts 6 where we see Stephen, A SAINT UNDER FIRE -- under the fire of opposition, and persecution, and, ultimately, death!

I want to do four things:

- 1) First, I want you to see the reason for the fire.
- 2) Second, the source of the fire, i.e., where the fire came from.
- 3) Third, the nature of the fire.
- 4) And finally, a special look at Stephen, the man under fire.

I. THE REASON FOR THE FIRE.

It is given to us in the latter part of verse 8.

We have read about "great wonders and miracles" before in the book of Acts (cf. 2:19, 22, 43; 4:30; 5:12), but, in the words Alexander, "This is the first instance of miraculous performances by any one not an Apostle . . ." (P. 249).

Stephen got the same kind of treatment that his Lord had gotten -- he was opposed for doing good, for helping people, for doing things for people that others could not do. But why did they hate him? Because it was a threat (or so it seemed) to their religion, and to the power that they had

over the lives of their people. Although these men were not the leaders of Israel, they were jealous for their leaders.

But let us look a little closer at these men who were

II. THE SOURCE OF THE FIRE.

They are described in verse 9.

The first thing that you are impressed with as you read this verse is that these were Jews who had lived, or were even then living, outside of Israel. They were, for the most part, Hellenists!

It is generally thought that "the Libertines" were Jews who had been exiled to Italy, and later released. The "Cyrenians" were from north Africa. The "Alexandrians," from Egypt. "Them of Cilicia and of Asia" were from the Roman province just north of Israel. Tarsus, where Paul was born, was in "Cilicia," and so this may a reference to him and to others from that part of the Empire.

But why should these Jews be so zealous for Judaism?

Matthew Henry tells us why:

They were Jews, but Hellenist Jews, Jews of of the dispersion, who seem to have been more zealous for their religion than the native Jews; it was with difficulty that they retained the practice and profession of it in the country where they lives, where they were as speckled birds, and not without great expense and toil that they kept up their attendance at Jerusalem, and this made them more active sticklers for Judaism than those were whose profession of their religion was cheap and easy (VI, 74).

This seems to be a good explanation as to why Stephen faced such bitter opposition from the non-Jerusalem Jews!

But, how did it get started, and what path did it follow (speaking of the fire of persecution)? Note:

III. THE NATURE OF THE FIRE.

You see this in the latter part of verse 9, then in verses 10-14.

It began with "disputing." When that failed, they resorted to false witnesses. When that failed, they suddenly, without any warning, apprehended them and forcibly took them to the Jewish council, and there again they mixed truth and

falsehood to spread false impressions about what Stephen had been preaching and teaching.

But one important thing for us to notice is that the trouble all began with a disputation over doctrinal matters, the kind of thing mentioned in verses 11 and 13.

But look again at verse 10. Matthew Henry says about the Jews in their opposition to Stephen that "they could neither support their own arguments nor answer his" (VI, 74).

Instead of seeing the hand of God in bringing them to Jerusalem and placing them in contact with Stephen that they might hear the truth, these Jews were so blinded in their own sin that they were taking steps to destroy the very one who was there to give them the words of eternal life!

And why did they lose out in their disputing with Stephen? Not only because they were arguing against the truth, but because they were arguing with the Holy Spirit. Cf. Luke 21:15, the promise that the Lord had given to His disciples during His time on earth:

For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.

And here we see that promise fulfilled according to verse 10.

— But, let us look finally at

IV. THE MAN UNDER FIRE: STEPHEN.

Although many things could be said about Stephen, let me speak of four things in particular.

A. He was a faithful man.

Where could you find a better illustration of our Lord's promise in Luke 19:26, " . . . unto every one which hath shall be given . . ." The point that the Lord was making was that, if we are faithful in what the Lord has given us to do, He will enlarge our ministry.

Stephen had been appointed to "serve tables," not
-- to perform miracles,
-- to preach.

BUT THE LORD HAD ENLARGED HIS MINISTRY.

It is even very likely that he had first encountered opposition in doing his work by running up against the unsaved relatives of widows he had been helping.

All that we read of Stephen shows him to have been a faithful man!

Secondly,

B. He was a man of the Word.

Otherwise Luke could never have said about him that he was "full of faith"! Cf. Rom. 10:17. Nor could he have so successfully have answered those Jews with whom he had those disputations. You would never have read what Luke wrote in verse 10 if Stephen had not been a man of the Word. And we shall see in Acts 7, Stephen's message, that he was very much a man of the Word!

Consequently, in the third place,

C. He was a man of power.

That power was evident in a special ministry the Lord gave him -- as he "did great wonders and miracles among the people" (v. 8b).

It was evident also in his disputing and in his preaching.

We see it also in the courage that he had to stand up against his Jewish enemies, not only when the initial group opposed him, but also when he was taken before the council.

Last of all,

D. He was an honored man. See the last verse of our text.

The council always looked in a man's behavior for evidences of guilt or innocence. Remember how Pilate marvelled at our Lord's silence.

But what did they see when they looked at Stephen. They "saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." This was a special way in which the Lord vindicated the ministry of Stephen.

Several things are of interest here:

- 1) It is interesting to think of the effect that this would have had upon the Sadducees (because some of them were obviously present -- see Acts 5:17) BECAUSE THEY DID NOT BELIEVE IN ANGELS!
- 2) The dispute had been mainly over the teachings of two persons: Moses, and Christ. And here, as though the Lord were saying that Moses and Christ and Stephen were all co-workers together with God, the Lord gave Stephen a countenance similar to that which Moses had when he came down from the mount,

and similar to that which our Lord had in the mount of transfiguration!

Thus Stephen, too, had the evidences of the supernatural upon him.

- 3) And then it is interesting to contemplate what Owen suggests in his comments on this passage. (See the following page of notes.) This is related not only to Acts 6:15, but also to Acts 7:55, 56. (Read.)

Concl: Do you see what lengths the Lord went to to minister to these unbelieving Jews -- bringing them to Jerusalem, putting them in contact with Stephen, letting them see the miracles which he performed, letting them hear Stephen as he explained the Word to them, letting them see his amazing courage as he stood against them, and then against the council, and finally, causing Stephen to reflect prematurely the glory that will be our when we get to heaven -- where Stephen was soon to be!

What has he done in your life? Perhaps there are those here this morning who are in a position similar to those Hellenistic Jews. The Lord has been ministering to you in a variety of ways -- putting you in touch with people who know the Lord, bringing you to the meeting of a group of Christian people where you could hear the Word, and allowing you to see people who have obviously been changed by Christ.

What are you going to do about it? Are you going to continue to oppose the truth of the Gospel just because it doesn't fit in with what you think, or, by God's grace, will you see that the Lord has been speaking to you, and that He has been at work in your life, and that He will save you right now if you will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation does not come through religious ceremonies; salvation can only be our through Christ. Therefore, without further delay, trust Him. And then you, too, will understand why Stephen could be so peaceful, and why he would rather die than to disown the One Who had died for him, and who had redeemed him at such a great cost.

Re: Acts 6:15.

"After we are clothed again with our flesh, we shall see our Redeemer with our eyes. We know not here what power and spirituality there will be in the acts of our glorified bodies. Such they will be as shall bear a part in eternal blessedness. Holy Stephen, the first martyr, took up somewhat of glory by anticipation before he died. For when he was brought to his trial before the council, all that sat therein, 'looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as the face of an angel,' Acts vi. 15. He had his transfiguration, according unto his measure, answerable unto that of our blessed Saviour in the mount. And by this initial beam of glory he received such a piercing vivacity and edge on his bodily eyes, that through all those inconceivable distances between the earth and the residence of the blessed, he looked steadfastly into heaven, and 'saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God,' Acts vii. 55, 56. Who, then, can declare what will be the power and acting of this sense of sight when perfectly glorified; or what sweetness and refreshment may be admitted into our souls thereby?"

-- Owen, Vol. I, p. 383.

THE CHURCH'S FIRST MARTYR
Acts 7

Scripture Reading: Acts 7:51-60.

Intro: There are several places in the Bible where you find different men resorting to a review of Israel's history for one reason or another.

-- Moses really started this by devoting one of his last messages (Deut. 1-4) to this very subject. There it was to encourage the people to obey the Lord.

-- Joshua did it in his very last message to his people, briefly tracing his people's history from Abraham's time to their own. This was to make them see that they must worship only God, and not give themselves to idolatry at all! (See Joshua 24.)

-- One of the Psalmists did this in Psalms 105 and 106. In these chapters it was to remind the people of the marvelous works of the Lord so that they would praise Him.

These are just some of the examples of the more lengthy historical reviews that we find in the Word of God.

And so Stephen is exercising a great Old Testament tradition when here in Acts 7 he does the same thing -- for yet another purpose. He expresses his purpose in verse 51. In his case, it was to cost him his life. Listen to what he said:

"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye."

Stephen is charging the Jews who were accusing him of turning against God, and His Law, and against the Temple. (See Acts 6: 11, 13, 14.) This would be the reason that Stephen concluded his message with a reference to the original building of the Temple and what Isaiah said about it later as not being able to contain God. Even Solomon had recognized this after he had finished the first temple. See 1 Kings 8:27.

But let us look at the chapter as a whole, tracing Stephen's thought, and noticing the tragic result which followed.

Although this chapter is long, there are just two parts to it:

- I. Stephen's message (vv. 1-53).
- II. Stephen's martyrdom (vv. 54-60).

I. STEPHEN'S MESSAGE (Acts 7:1-53).

This was given at his trial before the council. He had been brought before the council by the Hellenistic Jews mentioned in Acts 6:9.

Stephen spoke in response to a question which the high

priest directed toward him. See it in Acts 7:1. He did not answer the question the way the high priest would have expected him to answer. Instead, he actually brings a charge against his enemies, accusing them of doing what the people of Israel have done throughout their history!

But let us notice at least some of the details. Look with me at the two parts of his message:

- 1) The details of the message itself (vv. 1-50).
- 2) The charge, or accusation, which followed his message (vv. 51-53).

A. The details of the message itself (Acts 7:1-50).

We only have time to survey the details. I am hopeful that you know the history to which Stephen is referring throughout his message. In a sense Stephen is calling some of the outstanding men of the OT to witness in his behalf.

Look, first of all, at the men he mentioned.

1. Stephen's witnesses.
 - a. Abraham.
 - b. Isaac.
 - c. Jacob, who became Israel -- the one from whom the nation got its name.
 - d. The twelve patriarchs.
 - e. Joseph.
 - f. Moses.
 - h. Joshua.
 - g. Aaron.
 - i. David.
 - j. Solomon.
 - k. Two prophets: Amos and Isaiah.

What an array of witnesses! The very mention of their names would cause the Jews to listen -- as they did!

Stephen's message was taken from many of the books of Old Testament Scripture, so his authority could not be questioned.

Notice:

2. The books of Scripture to which Stephen referred:
 - a. Genesis.
 - b. Exodus.
 - c. Deuteronomy.
 - d. Joshua.
 - e. 2 Samuel.
 - f. 1 Kings.
 - g. 1 Chronicles.

- h. 2 Chronicles.
- i. Amos.
- j. Isaiah.

No one there could question his authority, nor the accurate way in which he used his authorities. What an important lesson this is in the use of the Word of God.

Stephen's message, referring to the men that he referred to, and the books that formed his authority, probably explains why the Jews listened quietly to him until he was finished.

But now let us inquire as to

- 3. Stephen's purpose in this review of Israel's history.

It was not

- as in the case of Moses, to get these Jews to obey the Lord (although Stephen would have been glad to see them do that),
- nor, as in the case of Joshua, to keep them from idolatry (although Stephen would have been thankful for that, too),
- nor was it, as in the case of the Psalmist, to get these Jews to praise the Lord,

BUT IT WAS TO GET THEM TO SEE THAT THEY WERE, BY THEIR ACTIONS, FOLLOWING IN THE REBELLIOUS COURSE THAT HAD CHARACTERIZED ISRAEL'S HISTORY FROM THE VERY BEGINNING.

I pointed this out at the beginning of my message, but we will look at it again when we get to Stephen's accusation against the Jews.

But just now let us notice the examples which Stephen cited.

- a. Perhaps (although this is not absolutely clear) he meant to include Abraham's failure to go on into Canaan until his father died.

See Acts 7:4.

- b. The rebellion of the patriarchs who sold Joseph.

See Acts 7:9.

- c. The nations' original rejection of Moses.

See Acts 7:22-29.

- d. The nations rebellion and idolatry at Sinai.

See Acts 7:37-41.

- e. The continued idolatry which characterized the history of Israel, and against which, e.g., Amos spoke (as did the other prophets).

Notice how Stephen emphasized the authority of his sources by referring to Amos' writings as "the book of the prophets" (Acts 7:42).

See Acts 7:42, 43.

- f. The empty formality in Isaiah's day.

See Acts 7:48-50. See also the context of Isaiah's words in his prophecy.

Again Stephen's authority is indicated by his reference to Isaiah, not by name, but as "the prophet." See Acts 7:48.

This has been the character of Israel's history from the very beginning. Moses said, on one occasion that it had never been anything else! And things were no different in Stephen's day.

But there was another side to Israel's history -- and this, too, is apparent in Stephen's message. It is:

- 4. The continual faithfulness of their sovereign God.

See it:

- a. In God's faithfulness to Abraham.
- b. In the way in which God overruled what Joseph's brothers did so that His own purposes were fulfilled.
- c. The Lord's preservation of His people in Egypt when Pharaoh would have kept them and destroyed them.
- d. The Lord's mercy to His people in spite of their continued rebellion on the way to Canaan, and in spite of their repeated rejection of their divinely-appointed leader, Moses.
- e. The ministry of the prophets throughout all of the years when Israel was both idolatrous and formally cold in heart toward the Lord.

A large part of that formality was the way in which they looked upon God as dwelling only in the Temple (which was also true when Stephen spoke this message).

All of the above brings us down to

- B. The charge, or accusation, which Stephen made against the Jews (Acts 7:51-53).

He charged them with a fourfold rejection of the things of the Lord -- and the four are intermingled with each other.

1. The rejection of the Holy Spirit. See v. 51.
2. The rejection of the Word of God as given in the message of the prophets. See v. 52a.
3. The rejection of Christ, "the Just One." See v. 52b.
4. The rejection of the Law which had been given by angels. See v. 53.

Stephen had introduced his charge by accusing them of being no better than rebellious, unregenerate Gentiles! This, of course, the Jews could not take!

And so we see

II. STEPHEN'S MARTYRDOM (Acts 7:54-60).

The word martyr is taken from the Greek word, witness. It was because of Stephen's witness that he became THE CHURCH'S FIRST MARTYR!

First we see

- A. The conviction of the mob (Acts 7:54).

The words mean that they were in great physical and mental agony -- to the point of grinding their teeth like they were in mortal pain.

- B. The revelation of Christ given to Stephen (Acts 7:55, 56).

Not every martyr is given them, but this is for the encouragement of all who give their lives for their faith.

- C. The violence of the crowd (Acts 7:57-59a). What hatred!

And what a way for Stephen to die -- as one who had himself blasphemed the Living God!

But notice how he died -- peacefully, and praying, just like the Lord Jesus did!

D. The death of Stephen (Acts 7:59b, 60).

1. His two prayers.

a. The first one for himself (v. 59).

Cf. how the Lord prayed in Luke 23:46,

"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

b. The second one for his enemies (v. 60).

Cf. how the Lord prayed in Luke 23:34,

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

2. His manner of dying (v. 60b).

He simply "fell asleep" -- like His Lord Who simply "gave up the ghost" (Luke 23:46), or, released His spirit!

Concl: Let me just mention two things in closing:

- 1) The great price that Stephen paid, and many others have paid, to bear witness to the Word of God. Therefore, do not expect witnessing to be easy. It may again lead to death for those who would be faithful to the Lord.
- 2) The sufficiency of God and the faithfulness of God to His people through all of their sin and through all of their trials.