



Wednesday Acts 5:12-16 a mixture of responses

Read: Acts 5:12-16

So far this week we have reminded ourselves of the gospel, and looked at the courage we need to share it. Today we come to an interesting passage in the middle of Acts 5, which is all about responses to the gospel.

The context for our passage is the testimony to God's grace of the believers (4:32-33) - but also what has just happened to Ananias and Sapphira, who have been struck dead for testing the Lord (5:1-11). Word about this new community is getting around, and we see that in verse 12, as the apostles do signs and wonders and they meet together in Solomon's Portico in the Temple area.

And then we get two verses which seem contradictory. On the one hand we are told that no one dared join them, although they were thought well of (v13). On the other hand we are told that ever more believers were being added - multitudes, men and women (v14). What is going on here? Well, in verse 13, the community is being protected from God from the kind of hypocrisy that we saw from Ananias and Sapphira, who might join the community without truly repenting. And yet those who were truly repentant, and turning to Jesus, the Lord brought them in (v14).

Finally we come to the rather confused responses we read about in verses 15 and 16. There is no evidence that Peter's shadow worked! There is much healing - but just as in Jesus' ministry, that doesn't always lead to belief.

There is then a mixture of responses here.

But God is at work, bringing people to Himself, and protecting His church, and we rejoice in that.

So today:

Give thanks to God for bringing people to Himself.

Pray that we would be ready to receive those whom God is calling to Himself.

Activity for Families with Children

Starter: get a bag of coins or marbles or similar and put some on a plate. Take it in turns adding them or taking them away. Discuss who is in charge of how many marbles or coins there are on the plate.

Read Acts 5:14

How did people come to be believers?

Who came to believe?

Read: lots and lots of different people come to believe in Jesus as Saviour and Lord, as the Lord brings them to Himself. It happened then, and it is happening now.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus we thank you that You call all kinds of people to Yourself. Amen.



Thursday Acts 5:40-42 Rejoicing in Dishonour

Read Acts 5:40-42

As we continue to move through the book of Acts, we come to another point in the narrative where the apostles have been arrested. This time however, they do not receive such sympathetic treatment, and it is only through the intervention of Gamaliel (5:34-39) that the apostles are allowed to go free, although not, verse 40, before they are beaten and charged not to speak about Jesus.

Last time we noted the apostles courage, and Peter and John refused to stop speaking. This time, we note the willingness of the apostles to suffer for the sake of Christ (verse 41), as they continued to obey the Lord and not men, continuing to preach and teach about Jesus (verse 42).

And those are the two lessons we take away from this passage. First, we hear that call to continue to tell other people about Jesus, even when that message is opposed. And then second, we recognise that this will sometimes involve suffering. Here the disciples are beaten - elsewhere in Acts, Stephen is stoned to death (Acts 7:54-60), and James the brother of John is killed by Herod (Acts 12:1-5).

And so we are to continue doing what the Lord has called us to do, sharing the good news of Christ, together - after the example of the apostles and the early church; come what may.

So today:

Give thanks for the witness of the apostles and their faithfulness to God

Pray for courage to persevere in sharing Jesus, even when we face opposition and persecution.

Activity for Families with Children

Starter: talk about the places we can go to learn about Jesus - church, Sunday club. Where else can we learn about Jesus? (home, a small group etc.)

Read Acts 5:42

What did the apostles do every day?

Where did they do it?

Read: We can learn about Jesus every day, and we can learn about Him anytime we open our bibles and talk to other people about Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank You that we can keep learning about You. Amen.



Friday

Acts 6:1-7 a surprising source of growth?

Read Acts 6:1-7

As we move on into Acts 6, we meet a problem in the early church: the food distribution is not being done right, verse 1. the problem seems to be one of time - the apostles aren't able to manage this as well as everything else (verse 2), so they ask for the names of good men who can be appointed (verse 3), so they can focus on their roles of praying and the ministry of the word (verse 4).

We are then told two things. First, we meet the men who are chosen, and who the apostles commission with the laying on of hands (verses 5 and 6). These men will have varied careers - particularly Stephen and Philip!

Then we hear of the net result of all this happening: the word of God continues to advance (verse 7). The good news goes out, and even some of the priests are converted. Luke's placement of this verse here isn't accidental: it shows the link between getting the internal working of the church in order—in this case, making sure food is being distributed fairly - and evangelism. If we want to be effective as a church in preaching the gospel, we need to make sure we are the kind of church we read about in these early chapters of Acts.

So how can we make sure that we are the kind of church which God will grow?

So today

Give thanks that God grows His church

Give thanks for those who serve the church - whatever their place of service

Pray that we might be the kind of church that is equipped to welcome new people.

Activity for Families with Children

Starter: talk about / Make a list of all the things that people do in church (preaching, teaching, cleaning, making coffee, welcome etc.)

Read Acts 6:2-4

What job needs to be done?

What job do the apostles need to do?

Read: God calls all sorts of different people to do all sorts of different things in His church. And we all get to serve God!

Prayer: Dear God thank You for all the people who serve You in church. Amen.



Tuesday

Acts 4:18-22 The courage to persevere

Read Acts 4:18-22

Yesterday we reminded ourselves of the good news of Jesus Christ, who died, rose again and is coming back. Today we see that the preaching of that good news is not always received as good news by those who hear it.

We pick up the story when Peter and John have been arrested for preaching about Jesus (v2). However, a man has been healed, and it is difficult to deny that (v14), so they just tell Peter and John not to speak about Jesus in verse 18. Peter and John's response is very important: they will not listen to their leaders on this, because they are compelled to speak of Jesus (v19-20).

We see the response of the council to this - a few more threats, but because the people are rejoicing in what has happened to the man, there was no way to punish them (v22-23). As we will see in chapter 5, things don't always go so smoothly.

We also see the importance of this for us. First, it is useful to know that the gospel will not always be well received—that is not our 'fault'. Second, we should obey authority—but not when that authority calls us to keep quiet about Jesus. We need to be winsome, and careful, and wise—but we also need to be bold to share the good news, and we need to help each other as a church to do that.

So today:

Give thanks to God for the good news of Jesus.

Pray for courage to keep sharing the good news with others.

Activity for Families with Children

Starter: talk about different words for doing things. There are things that you could do, or might do. Things that you'd like to do, things that you need to do - and things that you must do. Which are most important?

Read Acts 4:19-20

What must Peter and John talk about?

Why must they do this?

Read: Peter and John must talk about what they have seen and heard: that Jesus Christ died and rose again. We should speak about it too!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help me to talk to other people about you. Amen.



Monday

Acts 3:17-21 The call to repent

Read Acts 3:17-21

This week we begin by reminding ourselves of the gospel which the early church preached. Verse 17 reminds us the context: as Peter is preaching in Jerusalem, just a few weeks after Jesus' death and resurrection, he speaks particularly to the crowd who are assembled about their role in Jesus' death. But he then reminds them in verse 18 that this was God's plan—that the Christ must suffer.

This then leads to a call to repentance in verse 19, that sins might be forgiven or blotted out—because it is the death of Jesus on the cross which accomplishes forgiveness, as the messiah, the Christ suffers and dies for us.

And then in verses 20-21 Peter calls the attention of his audience to the future, to look forward to the return of Jesus at the appointed time. That is also the hope of the gospel: that we have been saved from our sins in Jesus Christ, and can look forward to the time when all things will be restored, in a new heavens and a new earth.

The message of the gospel that the early church preached stays the same: repent and believe in Jesus, who lived, who died, who rose again, who ascended into heaven, and who is coming back. This is the good news that we need to know, and the good news that we need to share with others.

So today:

Give thanks to Jesus for coming and suffering and dying in our place

Give thanks that Jesus is coming back to restore all things

Pray for courage to share this good news with others

Activity for Families with Children

Starter: talk about time. There are certain things we do at certain times of the day or week. we go to church on Sunday - but not school - we go to School on Monday, but not Saturday etc.

Read Acts 3:20-21

Where is Jesus now?

When is He coming back?

Read: Jesus Christ is in heaven now. But at just the right time He will come back, and all things will be restored and made new.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for being alive in heaven today, and that you are coming back. Amen.



Weekend

Acts 8:1-4 Scattered and Sharing

Read Acts 8:1-4

In our final look at the early chapters of Acts, we come to the events immediately after Stephen has been stoned for preaching the gospel (Acts 7). Here we see Saul persecuting the church in verse 1, and this persecution is so effective that it leads to the church being scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. There is bad news here - Stephen has died and is buried, verse 2, and Saul is very effectively persecuting the church, verse 3, but at the same time there is good that comes out of this, because those who are scattered preach the word (verse 4).

And so here we see a number of things. We see the promise of Acts 1:8, that the witness of the apostles and others will go out beyond Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria being fulfilled, and the rest of Acts will tell us how this gospel goes to the ends of the earth.

We see the continued reality of opposition to the gospel, and persecution of those who preach it.

We see how sharing the gospel clearly involves 'ordinary' believers - the apostles are still in Jerusalem (verse 1), but the gospel is still being shared.

Finally, we see the way God works through all circumstances to bring about His will - even when times are hard for His people, He is at work.

So we take the encouragement to share the gospel that we are given here - even as those who feel weak, fragile and scattered - and we trust in God's plans for His people.

So today

Give thanks for the good news and the opportunity we have to share it.

Pray for courage to share the gospel as God's scattered people.

Activity for Families with Children

Starter: (if you can bear it) take the plate of marbles from the other day... and scatter them over the table or the floor! When the chaos has subsided, talk about what is different about the marbles / coins now.

Read Luke Acts 8:1 and 4

Why did everybody get scattered?

What did they do?

Read: God's people were scattered, but they still told people about Jesus. We can follow their example

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, help us to talk about You wherever we are. Amen.



Evangelistically Active Week Two

Welcome to the second week of our bible reading notes looking at 'Evangelistically Active', which is our topic for the next five weeks in our morning service, leading up to Easter Day.

Our aim with these notes is to encourage one another to read God's word, so you may want commit with a friend to do these bible readings and to pray each day – and then ask each other how you've got on during the week.

This week we're going to spend some time looking at some of the passages from the early chapters of the book of Acts which show us how the early church spread the gospel.

These notes should hopefully be useful for individuals and for families with and without children. Each day, there is a bible passage to read – **read that first**, and **pray** - ask God to help you understand it. (If it is your habit to spend some time with the passage and make your own notes, then do that now.)

Once you've read the passage and thought about it – have a look at the accompanying notes. The notes cover some of the context of the passage, an explanation and an application. There are also some accompanying questions or suggestions for action. As God speaks to you through his word, you may wish to write down what he is calling you to do (and share it with someone!) However, don't worry if sometimes you don't receive an obvious answer to prayer or clear instruction – just keep faithfully reading God's word, and He will use it in your life, as the Holy Spirit works in you.

After you've looked at the bible passage is a good time to pray – pray for strength to do what you need to do – thank God for what you have learned about him – and bring your requests before him.

Then, you'll see that there is an activity for families with children; the target age range of these activities is 4-11ish, so you may need to modify them. This activity draws on one or two of the verses you've been reading, and give you some suggestions for sharing them with the family – over the breakfast or tea table perhaps. There's a starter activity to get people thinking, then reading the passage, some questions to answer, and then something to read – and a prayer so you don't forget to pray (just a starting point – do pray for longer if you can). Should take about five minutes – but can easily expand if you want it to.

Don't worry about communicating everything – particularly if you've got small children – communicating something of the good news of Jesus Christ every day is a great place to begin.

Enjoy – and let me know how you get on

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James".