

Acts: Seeing the Spirit at Work
Sunday Morning Bible Study
Lesson Three – Acts 3:1-4:31

Jesus has returned to heaven before the very eyes of the astounded disciples. Matthias has been chosen to replace Judas. The Holy Spirit has descended upon the earth with great power and in ways that cannot be explained away by the religious leaders. Thousands are coming to Jesus. The believers of Jesus are together in love, fellowship and meeting each other's needs. Instead of the world rejoicing and embracing with open arms all the good things God is doing, resistance begins to build.

This resistance to the gospel of Jesus Christ continues today. The church needs to observe and learn from the early church how to remain faithful and active in the proclamation of truth, even though the cost is great—through the power of the Holy Spirit. Although the coming of the Spirit was a unique and unrepeatable historical event, all the people of God can now always and everywhere benefit from his ministry.

Open

- When have you been persecuted for living or proclaiming truth about Jesus?

Study

- *Read Acts 3:1-10.* What triggered the opposition of the Jewish authorities was the healing of the cripple, together with Peter's sermon which followed it. Luke began his second volume by telling his readers that he was going to record what Jesus continued "to do and to teach" through his apostles (1:1-2). He has also told us that "many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles" (2:43). Now he supplies a particular, dramatic example.

1. Describe, as if you were there looking on, what happened between Peter and John and the man who was crippled from birth.

The crippled man was sitting beside the same gate each day for his entire life (40 years). He would ask passersby for money. When Peter and John walked by, he asked them for money, but they had none. Instead, they offered him what they did have, which was the power of Jesus Christ. They told him to rise up and walk, which he did. The crippled man became a healed man.

2. How did the crippled man respond?

The text says that he leaped up, stood, and began to walk. He then entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God (3:8).

How did all the people respond?

“And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him” (3:9-10).

3. *Read Acts 3:11-26.* The most remarkable feature of Peter’s second sermon, as of his first, is its Christ-centeredness. He directed the crowd’s attention away from both the healed cripple and the apostles to the Christ. What vital points did Peter make in his sermon to the crowd?

The Father glorified the Son (3:13), the people rejected the Son (3:13-15), what happened to the Son was foretold (3:17-18), forgiveness and refreshing times are found in the Son (3:19-20), the Son is the Prophet sent to call people back to the Father (3:21-26)

4. Look at each of the titles Peter gives to Jesus. How do each of these speak to the uniqueness of Jesus?

Servant (3:13) – Rather than staying in heaven, Jesus stooped down to serve his people and the Father (Phil. 2:5-11; Mark 10:45)

Holy and Righteous One (3:14) – Jesus is the only man referred to as “Holy” and the “Righteous One.” These are terms reserved in the OT for God, Yahweh.

Author of Life (3:15) – No other man is labeled the “Author of Life.” It points us to passages like John 1 and Colossians 1:15.

The Christ (3:20) – Jesus is God’s “anointed one,” the one chosen for a specific purpose. Jesus was sent by the Father to live the perfect life and die as a substitute for sinners.

Prophet (3:22) – Jesus spoke for the Father, which is what a prophet does. Yet, he spoke as one having authority (Matthew 7:29).

5. Peter ends his sermon by challenging his hearers with the necessity of repentance. What blessings would follow if they repented (vv. 19-26)?

Sins are blotted out (3:19), times of refreshing (3:20), the return of Christ (3:21)

6. *Read Acts 4:1-22.* What do we learn about the attitude of the religious leaders toward Peter and John?

They were “annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (4:2). Even though they could not deny that God did a mighty work (4:13-16), they were unwilling to repent and believe. Instead, they wanted the apostles to stop preaching.

7. Peter has given a comprehensive testimony to Jesus as rejected by humanity but vindicated by God, as the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecy, as demanding repentance and promising blessing, and as the author and giver of life, physically to the healed cripple and spiritually to those who believe. This aroused the indignation and antagonism of the authorities. Why do you think this proclamation of Jesus was disturbing to the religious leaders?

The religious leaders preached the Law and saw themselves as the spiritual elite. The apostles were proclaiming a message of grace and forgiveness, not for the elite, but for the common man. This new message threatened the religious leaders’ position of prominence and authority.

8. How would you explain the connection between the healed cripple and salvation (vv. 9-12)?

The crippled man was healed physically to demonstrate the power of the risen Christ. Yet, while physical healing is great, what we really need is spiritual healing. That spiritual healing also is found in Jesus, for “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (4:12). Even the physical healing that some people experience in this life does not compare to the ultimate physical healing we will experience when Jesus returns to make all things new.

9. What evidence do you see of the power of the Holy Spirit throughout this section?

The boldness of Peter and John (4:13), the eloquence of Peter’s sermon, the healing power they demonstrate to the crippled man, even the fact that the religious leaders understood that an act of God had been done

10. *Read Acts 4:23-31.* Describe the prayer in these verses.

The prayer is focused on God, thankful, and intent upon the continued work of the Holy Spirit. The apostles want to continue making the message of Jesus known.

How is it different than you would expect it to be after all that Peter and John had been through?

One might expect them to pray that they would not get into more trouble, or that they would be spared hardship. However, their prayer is focused on seeing the Son magnified among more people.

11. List the three requests in verses 29-30. What is the significance of these requests?

“grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness” – it’s a prayer for the power to see more miracles accomplished, more sermons preached, and more people repent

“stretch out your hand to heal” – the desire to see more physical healing that points to spiritual healing

“signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus” – these signs and wonders will point to Jesus as the divine Son who conquered sin and death and has power over this world

12. Why were they able to respond to persecution in this way?

They realized that the proclamation of the Gospel was more important than what Paul calls “these slight momentary afflictions” (2 Cor. 4:4). Jesus and His redemptive plan are much more important than physical comfort.

Summary: We observe that before the people came to any petition, they filled their minds with thoughts of the divine sovereignty. First, he is the God of creation, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them (v. 24). Second, he is the God of revelation, who spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David, and in Psalm 2 (already in the first century B.C. recognized as Messianic) had foretold the world's opposition to his Christ, with nations raging, people plotting, kings standing and rulers assembling against the Lord's Anointed (vv. 25-26). Third, he is the God of history, who had caused even his enemies (Herod and Pilate, Gentiles and Jews, united in a conspiracy against Jesus, v. 27) to do what his power and will had decided beforehand should happen (v. 28). This, then, was the early church's understanding of God, the God of creation, revelation and history, whose characteristic actions are summarized by the three verbs *made* (v. 24), *spoke* (v. 25), and *decided* (v. 28).

Apply

- When have you seen resistance, subtle or overt, to the gospel of Christ?

What truth from this passage equips you to face this resistance?

Who is suffering persecution for the gospel that you could be praying for?

Pray

- Praise the Lord Jesus for who he is and specifically for what is revealed about him in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to prepare you for and minister through you in persecution.

All material taken from:

John Stott, *Acts: Seeing the Spirit at Work*. Downers Grove, IL: IV Press, USA, 1998.