

OUR FOUNDATION

SERMON NOTES

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ABOUT THESE NOTES

Kenneth Schenck's book, *Our Foundation*, draws us back to the dynamic days of the early church. Our risen Lord met with his disciples and promised the Holy Spirit would soon baptize them into Jesus' powerful witnesses. Their witness would begin in Jerusalem and then expand to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Schenck tracks this powerful witness from the church's founding to its arrival on the doorstep of worldwide missions (Acts 1–12).

You and your congregation will discover numerous lessons about personal spiritual growth and church dynamics as you preach on *Our Foundation*. Serving as Jesus' witnesses was not an easy assignment in the first century, nor is it any easier today. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit empowered the early church, and his power is still available.

IT HAPPENED AT PENTECOST

Acts 1:4, 14; 2:1–37

INTRODUCTION

The birth of a baby is always exciting, especially for the mom and dad. They enjoy holding their newborn bundle of joy, cooing to the “world’s most beautiful child,” counting his or her toes and fingers, and deciding who the baby resembles. Many parents commemorate a child’s first birthday with a big party, but loving parents always remember that special occasion when their baby was born.

The church was born on the day of Pentecost, but have too many Christians forgotten that important birth? Do we need to celebrate Pentecost anew and appropriate the blessings of that historic occasion? What happened at Pentecost?

SERMON OUTLINE

I. The Believers Gathered Together (Acts 1:4, 14; 2:1)

A. In Prayer (Acts 1:14)

They banded together in prayer.

B. In Obedience to the Risen Lord (Acts 1:4; 2:1)

They waited for the gift of the Holy Spirit as the Lord had commanded.

II. The Holy Spirit Arrived (Acts 2:2–4)

A. The Accompanying Phenomena (Acts 2:2–3)

The Spirit's arrival was accompanied by the sound of a violent wind and the appearance of tongues of fire that rested on each believer.

B. The Amazing Power (Acts 2:4)

The Spirit filled the believers and empowered them to speak in languages they had not learned. Today, as then, the Holy Spirit equips believers for evangelism. He does not send us on a mission without enabling us to perform the mission.

III. The Church Began (Acts 2:5–47)

A. With a Supernatural Witness (Acts 2:5–13)

The believers declared God's wonderful works in the languages of the foreign Jews who had come to Jerusalem for the Jewish feasts.

B. With a Christ-Centered Message (Acts 2:14–40)

Peter quoted Scripture profusely to identify Jesus as the prophesied and divinely approved Savior. He told the Jews they had crucified Jesus but God had raised him from the dead and exalted him to his right hand.

C. With a Loving Fellowship (Acts 2:41–47)

Those who heard Peter's message fell under conviction and asked what they should do. Peter assured them they would find forgiveness by repenting and believing in Jesus.

Three thousand Jews heeded Peter's instructions, were baptized, and became members of the first church in history. The church was a loving fellowship of devoted, prayerful, sacrificing, praiseful, and joyful believers. Its ranks increased daily as God saved more and more people.

CONCLUSION

As a church in a small town was burning one evening, the residents rushed to watch the firefighters battle the flames. An elder turned for a moment and saw the town's well-known atheist standing there. The elder commented, "Joe, this is the first time I've seen you at church."

"Well," the atheist replied, "this is the first time I've seen the church on fire."

The newborn church was on fire in Jerusalem, because the Holy Spirit had ignited the fire. The Holy Spirit can set our church ablaze too, if we submit to him and rely on his power to make us zealous witnesses of the gospel.

THE BEGGAR WHO GOT A LIFT

Acts 3:1–10

INTRODUCTION

We can't travel far in our cities without seeing men and women begging for money. Usually, they stake their territory near a busy intersection and hold a sign that may announce: "Need money for food" or "Lost my job" or "Disabled and need help." Occasionally a sign simply reads, "Help!"

One day Peter and John encountered a beggar at the temple gate. He wasn't carrying a sign, but he desperately needed help because he had been crippled from birth. What happened to this beggar demonstrated the power of the Holy Spirit in Peter's life.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. The Beggar's Plight (Acts 3:1–2)

A. Unable to Walk

The beggar lay at the temple gate every day. He was placed there so he could beg from worshipers.

The Bible categorizes everyone as spiritually crippled from birth (Ps. 51:5). We sustained a heavy casualty in the fall and are unable to walk uprightly before God. Our whole being is crippled, including our minds, our wills, and our emotions (Eph. 2:1–3). Until God saves us, we do not think right; we do not obey God; and we do not love God.

B. Unassisted by Religion

The beggar was in reach of religion, but religion could not lift him out of his plight. Countless thousands of spiritually needy people today look to religion to rescue them from their sin, but religion is unable to help them (Phil. 3:4–9).

II. The Beggar's Transformation (Acts 3:3–7)

A. The Source of the Transformation (Acts 3:3–6)

The beggar wanted Peter and John to give him money, but they had no money. Instead, they gave him a remarkable transformation through the power of Jesus Christ.

B. The Strength of the Transformation (Acts 3:7)

Jesus gave the crippled beggar strength. When Jesus saves a sinner, he gives him or her strength to stand upright before God (see Rom. 5:1–2).

III. The Beggar's Walk (Acts 3:8–10)

A. Vibrant (Acts 3:8)

The beggar could now walk and jump. When Jesus saves us, he gives us abundant life. He puts a spring in our step!

B. Praiseful (Acts 3:8)

The beggar had much to be thankful for, so he praised God. Do we praise him for our salvation and daily blessings? We should (see Ps. 107:1; 135:3).

C. Noticed (Acts 3:9–10)

The people noticed the beggar walking, jumping, and praising God (v. 9). They were filled with wonder and amazement at his transformation. Our transformed lives (2 Cor. 5:17) should gain people's attention and glorify God (Matt. 5:16).

CONCLUSION

The apostle Peter performed the healing the crippled man in the power of the Holy Spirit. The same power is available to us. We may not heal the infirm, but we may serve as instruments in God's hands to introduce lost souls to Jesus, who can save them and make it possible for them to walk in holiness in God's sight.

HYPOCRITES, BEWARE!

Acts 4:36—5:11

INTRODUCTION

It is almost always a good thing for a husband and wife to be in agreement. If they both agree to buy a car or invest some money, neither will blame the other if the purchase or investment turns out poorly. Without agreement, trouble may ensue. For example, if one spouse put up the house for sale without the other agreeing, drastic results would surely follow. Acts 5 tells us about a husband and wife who totally agreed to sell a piece of property, but drastic results followed.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Shared Hypocrisy (Acts 4:36—5:4)

A. The Possible Motivation (Acts 4:36–37)

Barnabas, who was a highly respected member of the church at Jerusalem and an encourager, sold property and laid the money at the apostles' feet. He did this to help the needy, likely foreigners who had become believers at Pentecost. They lacked jobs, and therefore needed assistance.

Ananias and Sapphira must have seen or heard what Barnabas had done and wanted get attention by doing the same thing.

B. The Actual Sin (Acts 5:1–4)

It was not wrong to donate only some of the proceeds gained from selling a piece of property, but they pretended to donate the entire amount. This act was hypocritical, and God judges hypocrisy (Matt. 24:50–51).

Ananias's pretense did not fool Peter. Peter saw that Ananias had yielded to Satan's temptation and had lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3–4). Interestingly, Peter identified the Holy Spirit as God. This identification affirms the Spirit's deity.

II. Swift Judgment (Acts 5:5–19)

A. On Ananias (Acts 5:5–6)

Ananias fell dead instantly, and young men wrapped his body, carried him out, and buried him. This swift judgment demonstrates dramatically God's attitude toward hypocrisy. If he executed similar judgment today, how many of us would be left standing?

B. On Sapphira (Acts 5:7–10)

Perhaps Sapphira had gone shopping with the money left over from the sale of the property. When she arrived three hours after her husband's death, she did not know what had transpired. But she lied to Peter. She said the donated amount was the full amount received from the sale. Swift judgment fell on her, as it had on her husband.

This dramatic judgment fell on Ananias and Sapphira at a critical juncture in the early church's history as clear evidence that God requires holiness and purity on the part of believers. Similar judgment fell on Achan and his family in the early days of Israel's invasion of Canaan to show that God requires obedience and love for him rather than love of possessions and money (see Josh. 7:19–26).

III. Significant Reaction (Acts 6:11)

A. Inside the Church

As a result of what happened to Ananias and Sapphira, fear gripped the whole church. The believers realized God is holy and sin exacts a bitter cost. Does the whole church today possess this realization?

B. Outside the Church

All who heard about God's judgment on hypocritical Ananias and Sapphira experienced intense fear. How does the culture today react to what God is doing among his people? Does a healthy fear of God extend beyond the walls of our church?

CONCLUSION

Someone commented that Ananias and Sapphira professed cream but practiced skim milk. Let's allow the cream to rise to the top of our lives and stay there!

GOD'S HAND IN MOSES' LIFE

Acts 7:20–38

INTRODUCTION

Have you reflected on your life and discovered evidence that God arranged the circumstances that brought you to faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord? Perhaps you survived a serious car accident or a medical emergency that made you realize God kept you alive for a reason. You came to the conclusion that he had a significant purpose for your life. His hand was certainly on Moses' life so Moses would become the person by whom God would deliver his people from bondage and give them his words.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. God's Providential Care of Moses (Acts 7:20–29)

A. When Moses Was a Helpless Baby (Acts 7:20–22)

When baby Moses was supposed to be put to death by order of Pharaoh (Ex. 1:15), Moses' parents hid him from danger as an act of faith for three months (Acts 7:20). Undoubtedly they could not have done so without God's favor. How else can we explain their ability to keep a baby quiet and undetected for that long?

Did God protect you from birth so you would have the opportunity to know and serve him? The answer is yes.

When they could hide him no longer, Moses' parents placed him in a basket and set him among the reeds of the Nile River. That's where Pharaoh's daughter found him, took him into the palace, hired Moses' mother to be his nurse, and raised him as her own child.

Consequently, Moses received an outstanding education. Only God could orchestrate such an amazing string of events.

B. When Moses Committed a Huge Blunder (Acts 7:23–29)

When Moses was forty years old, he defended an Israelite against a cruel Egyptian taskmaster, killing the Egyptian. He thought the Israelites would recognize him as God’s appointed deliverer, but they didn’t. The timing was not God’s. Moses feared Pharaoh would seek revenge, so he fled to Midian.

When we fail to wait on God and rush to action, disastrous results may follow. The psalmist wisely counseled us to “wait for the LORD” (Ps. 27:14). Fortunately for Moses, God preserved him in Midian and taught him how to be a shepherd, so that forty years later Moses would shepherd the Israelites from Egypt through the desert.

God has a way of leading us from our blunders to his blessings.

II. God’s Powerful Call of Moses (Acts 7:30–36)

Moses was eighty years old when God called him to deliver his people from Egypt. No one is ever too old to do what God wants him or her to do.

A. The God of the Patriarchs Called Moses to Serve Him (Acts 7:30–32)

By identifying himself as the God of the patriarchs, God gave Moses assurance of his power. As he had worked through the patriarchs, he would work through Moses.

B. The God of Holiness Called Moses to Serve Him (Acts 7:33–34)

God spoke to Moses from a burning bush that was not consumed, and he called the place holy ground. The ground was just ordinary ground, but it became holy because Holy God was present there. This revelation showed Moses that he was being called by a holy God to represent him in Egypt. Do we realize that God is holy and we should be humble in his presence? We dare not trivialize God’s character by forgetting that he is holy.

C. The God of Infinite Power Called Moses to Serve Him (Acts 7:35–36)

When it was God’s time to deliver the Israelites, he sent Moses “to be their ruler and deliverer” (v. 35). He also freed the Israelites from Egypt and “performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness” (v. 36).

We should not hesitate to serve God, because nothing is too hard for him. We are weak, but he is strong!

III. God’s Prophetic Message through Moses (Acts 7:37–38)

A. Moses Predicted the Messiah (Acts 7:37)

Read this prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:18.

B. Moses Presented God’s Words (Acts 7:38)

At Mount Sinai, Moses received God’s Commandments and instructions and passed them along to the people.

We, too, have received God’s “living words” to pass on to others. Are we faithfully holding out the Word of Life to others (Phil. 2:16)?

CONCLUSION

We may think only the young, rich, famous, highly educated, most attractive, or most talented are qualified to serve God, but such thinking is wrong. God called Moses to serve him not when Moses was in a palace, but when he was on the backside of the desert; not when he was a prince, but when he was a shepherd; not when he was a somebody, but when he was a nobody. God delights to use those who are humble and in awe of his holiness. In order to serve God, we must understand that our best ability is our availability. Are you available to answer his call today?

DOWN WITH PREJUDICE!

Acts 10

INTRODUCTION

Prejudice abounds in our fallen world in different forms: racial, social, physical, political, religious, and economic, to name a few. But God is no respecter of persons, and he proved this fact by giving his Son as the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2).

Even the apostle Peter harbored prejudice. As a Jew, he was strongly prejudiced against Gentiles. However, at a point in his Christian life, Peter received clear notice from God that he must abandon this prejudice.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. The Occasion (Acts 10:1–8)

A. A Gentile Was Praying (Acts 10:1–2)

Cornelius, a Roman centurion and a devout seeker of God, prayed every day.

B. God Was Listening (Acts 10:3–8)

God, who loves without partiality, heard Cornelius's prayers, and instructed Cornelius to send messengers to Joppa to bring Peter to him. Cornelius promptly obeyed.

Perhaps God will connect us with seekers so we can share the good news with them.

II. The Object Lesson (Acts 10:9–16)

A. A Sheet of Assorted Creatures (Acts 10:19–12)

In a trance, Peter saw a sheet of assorted creatures descending to earth. He was hungry, but he refused to eat what Levitical law declared unclean (Lev. 11). He failed to understand that the law ended at Calvary and Christ fulfilled the law (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:23–25).

B. A Command to Slay and Eat (Acts 10:13–16)

Three times a voice commanded Peter to kill and eat the creatures, but Peter refused in spite of being told that he should “not call anything impure that God has made clean” (v. 15).

Later, Peter would learn the lesson that God accepted forgiven, cleansed Gentiles as openly as he accepted forgiven, cleansed Jews. In Christ, God knocked down the wall that separated Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 1:11–14).

If prejudice exists in our hearts, we should confess and forsake it. In its place, we should demonstrate the love that the Holy Spirit has placed in our hearts (Rom. 5:5). We need to love our neighbors regardless of their ethnicity, educational background, social status, or any other difference.

III. The Outcome (Acts 10:17–46)

A. A Changed Heart (Acts 10:17–23)

While Peter was still trying to ascertain the meaning of the object lesson, messengers from Cornelius arrived. When they explained the purpose of their visit, Peter had a change of heart about Gentiles. He showed them hospitality.

B. A Converted Household (Acts 10:23–46)

Peter accompanied the messenger to Cornelius’s home, humbly explained his change of heart, and asked why Cornelius had sent for him.

After hearing Cornelius’s explanation, Peter shared the truth that God does not show favoritism but offers peace to all people through Jesus Christ. He declared the good news and promised, “Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (v. 43).

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The phenomena that had accompanied the Spirit’s descent at Pentecost gave evidence that God had saved the Gentiles in Cornelius’s home (vv. 44–46).

CONCLUSION

Several years ago a popular song insisted that what the world needs now is love, sweet love. However, the song failed to define “love, sweet love.” As Christians we can declare that the love of God shared freely by us is what the world needs now. Let’s share it without one bit of prejudice!

—  *Week 6*  —

A DYNAMIC CHURCH
Acts 11:19–30

INTRODUCTION

Churches with mottos like “We shall not be moved” fail to extend a friendly welcome to visitors. Their services are dull, repetitious, and routine. The Bible is rarely opened. The “worshippers” are either half asleep or fully asleep. And they do not share the gospel with the lost. These churches are not dynamic.

Other churches are altogether different. They greet every visitor warmly and sincerely. Their services honor God and touch the hearts of the worshippers. The Bible is taught clearly and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Only those with narcolepsy slumber, and the gospel extends far beyond the church walls. These churches are dynamic, and they resemble the church at Antioch.

Acts 11 shows us what the church at Antioch was like.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. The Antioch Church Was a Gentile Church (Acts 11:19–21)

A. Born out of Persecution (Acts 11:19–20)

Jesus instructed his disciples to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), but it took persecution to move the process along (11:19). Although the scattered believers witnessed primarily to Jews, some shared the good news with Gentiles at Antioch (v. 20).

B. Brought to Christ by the Gospel (Acts 11:21)

As a result of the Lord’s blessing on the witness to the Gentiles, many believed. Thus, a Gentile church was born in Antioch.

What might happen if persecution struck the church in North America? Would it result in something bad or something good? If history serves as an accurate indicator, the persecuted church would thrive and present a bold witness to many.

II. The Antioch Church Was a Growing Church (Acts 11:22–24)

A. Its Reputation Reached Jerusalem (Acts 11:22)

Word about what was happening at Antioch reached Jerusalem, so the church there dispatched Barnabas to Antioch on a fact-finding mission. Obviously, the Jerusalem church trusted Barnabas to return with an accurate report of what was taking place at Antioch.

B. Its Growth in Grace Impressed Barnabas (Acts 11:23–24)

When Barnabas saw what was taking place at Antioch, he was impressed. There was clear evidence that God’s grace was producing spiritual fruit among the believers, so he encouraged them to “remain true to the Lord with all their hearts” (v. 23). Apparently, his presence at Antioch did encourage the believers and inspire them to keep spreading the gospel. We read in verse 24 that “a great number of people were brought to the Lord.”

When a godly leader encourages a spiritually minded congregation to keep on keeping on for the Lord, it is not surprising that many unbelievers come to know the Lord.

III. The Antioch Church Was a Well-Taught Church (Acts 11:25–26)

A. Its Teachers Were Extraordinary (Acts 11:25–26)

Barnabas summoned the apostle Paul to Antioch, where they team-taught the church for a full year. These men were holy, unselfish, and well acquainted with the Scriptures. It must have their teaching that attracted “great numbers of people” (v. 26). A church that is well taught is one that attracts others to the Word of God and to the God of the Word.

B. Its Testimony Was Effective (Acts 11:26)

The Word implanted in the hearts of the Antiochan believers became the illustrated Word in their lives. Those who saw the reality of their faith saw Jesus in their words and deeds. Therefore, they dubbed them “Christians” (v. 26). This was the first time in the history of the first-century church that believers were called Christians. Those who observed the believers recognized that they were a distinct group, a group that belonged to and followed Jesus.

IV. The Antioch Church Was a Compassionate Church (Acts 11:27–30)

A. The Crisis Predicted (Acts 11:27–28)

When certain prophets arrived at Antioch, one of them by the name of Agabus predicted that a severe famine would strike the Roman world.

B. The Care Provided (Acts 11:29–30)

This famine would exert a harsh impact on the poor believers in Judea, so the believers at Antioch determined to help. They prepared a gift and sent it to the believers in Judea (vv. 29–30). This may have been a gift of money (1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:7). Every Christian in the Antiochan church contributed to the fund “as each one was able” (Acts 11:29).

When it comes to giving, some give with all their might, but others refuse to give. We must not give out of constraint but out of love for the Lord!

CONCLUSION

The church at Antioch was a dynamic church, but it was not perfect. No church is perfect because people are not perfect. We Christians are forgiven, and we should be making progress toward perfection, but in the meantime we are works in progress (Eph. 2:10). However, in spite of our imperfections, we can join hearts and hands in the work of the Lord. Together, like the church at Antioch, we can be a dynamic church where God has planted us.