

# (Through the Bible) Acts - Part 1

by Zac Poonen

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*Zac Poonen's sermon on Acts emphasizes the continuation of Jesus' work through His disciples, the importance of the Holy Spirit, and the call to be witnesses of the resurrection.*

**Duration:** 57:33

**Scripture:** Acts 1:1-2

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Discipleship"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the Acts of the Apostles, highlighting the continuation of Jesus' work through his disciples over 2,000 years. It emphasizes the importance of following Jesus' example of doing and teaching, the high standard of leadership in the New Covenant, the need for the power of the Holy Spirit, the significance of being witnesses of Jesus' resurrection, and the impact of godly reactions to persecution. The narrative also touches on the conversion of Saul (Paul) and the role of Ananias in his journey.

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## Transcript

Let's turn today to Acts of the Apostles. In the Acts of the Apostles, we begin with these words, which are very significant. It's written by Luke.

Continuation of Luke's Gospel. And he says, the first account, which is Luke's Gospel, verse chapter 1, verse 1, I compose Theophilus of all that Jesus began to do and teach. So what is the subject of Luke's Gospel? All that Jesus began to do and teach.

What is the subject of Acts of the Apostles? All that Jesus continued to do and teach through his disciples. And that has continued now through 2,000 years. The Acts of the Apostles is not finished.

It's continuing. The last word of the Acts of the Apostles is unhindered. It says about the Apostle Paul that he preached and taught concerning the Lord Jesus with all openness, unhindered.

And there is no I'm in there. It goes on and on and on for 2,000 years. So that first verse is very significant.

And also, though it's referring to Jesus' actions and words, I believe there's a principle involved in Acts 1.1, which we must bear in mind, that Jesus first did, then taught. He did not just teach. He did and taught.

And that is the principle of the New Covenant. Samson could, you know, not live the life, but still be a leader, but not in the New Covenant. Gideon could ultimately end up worshiping idols, be a leader, but not in the New Covenant.

Even a man like David would disqualify to continue as a leader under the New Covenant, because he had so many wives, and was a leader, and he fell into adultery. And once a leader falls into adultery, my personal conviction is, though he can be restored to fellowship with the Lord, he cannot be restored to leadership. It's a very high standard of leadership in the New Covenant.

So it's important that we follow this principle. Jesus began to do and teach, and Jesus continues to do and teach through us, if we want to understand the Acts of the Apostles, this New Covenant that God has established. And verse 5, I told you, is again the promise that you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit, just like John the Baptist said.

And then, they asked him this question, when he said, you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit, they immediately thought of an earthly kingdom. You see, the mind of Old Covenant people is always on earthly things. God blessed me means, he's given me money.

God blessed me means, he's given me many children. God blessed me means, he's given me a house. Or God blessed me means, he's given me a wife.

This is characteristic of Old Covenant people. And whenever your thinking is like that, it shows you are an Old Covenant Christian, no matter how much you understand about the New Testament. If automatically you think that earthly blessing is God's blessing, just stop for a moment and think of the millions of people who don't worship God, who have got much more blessing than you in that case.

And you'll see the folly of that type of thinking. The mark of New Covenant blessing is heavenly. Okay, so immediately they said, you mean we are going to be baptized in the Holy Spirit? That means you're going to restore the kingdom to Israel? We are all going to be kings and prime ministers and defense ministers and all that here? And the Lord said, no.

Sorry to disappoint you. That's not what I meant. It's not for you to know.

It's not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Lord has put in his own power. That's a very important verse. Verse 7. It's not for us to know about times and seasons.

That's in God's hand. When Jesus is going to come, I don't know. That's not for me to know.

But what I do need to know is the power of the Holy Spirit. Now there are a lot of Christians today, for example, when they study Revelation, the book of Revelation, they're always interested in times and seasons. The very thing which it says in verse 7 you should not be interested in.

What we need is the power of the Holy Spirit. So if you're seeking God for something, don't seek for an understanding of times and seasons and prophetic details, but for the power of the Holy Spirit. What is the mark, the identifying mark, of being baptized in the Holy Spirit? Acts 1.8. Power.

Jesus never said you shall receive tongues when you are empowered with the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you shall receive power. Now I believe there are many, many godly men through the centuries who never spoke in tongues, but who received the power of the Holy Spirit.

And that's the main thing. God may also give the gift of tongues, but it's not necessarily given to everybody. Even to the church in Corinth, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14, I wish you all spoke in tongues, which proves they did not all speak in tongues.

So we must accept that fact, that they did not all speak in tongues, even in the first century. Some people make us believe as though every first century believer spoke in tongues. It's not true.

But it was, it is God's will that every Christian should have power. Tongues is one gift. It's not the most important, certainly, but every Christian should have power.

And power does not mean that you'll become an evangelist. Just because you hear the testimony of somebody like Moody or Finney, that when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit, suddenly, Moody says, I preached the same sermons after I was baptized in the Holy Spirit, and hundreds were converted. And you think that if you get baptized in the Holy Spirit, hundreds will be converted.

No. If you're an evangelist, perhaps. See, the best illustration I can use is from the human body.

For a member to be a member of this body, one sign is that the blood must flow through that member. If the blood flows through a part of this body, that's part of my body. If I have an artificial hand, that's not part of the body, because the blood does not flow in it.

But this little finger, the blood flows in it, so it's part of the body. That's a picture of the blood of Christ, which determines whether I'm part of Christ's body or not. But even when the blood flows in my hand, my hand may be paralyzed.

So I am a member of the body. This hand is a member of the body, but it's a useless member. What does this hand need? Power.

And when it gets power, will it become a mouth or a tongue? No. It'll become a powerful hand. If the tongue is paralyzed, when it gets power, what will it become? It won't become a hand.

It'll become a powerful tongue. So if God has called you to be a mother, and you get filled with the Spirit, what will you be? You won't be an evangelist. You'll be a powerful, spirit-filled mother.

And if your calling is to be a teacher, and God fills you with the Spirit, you'll be a powerful teacher, not a powerful evangelist. It's a wrong conception that many people have, that power means we'll suddenly all become like tongues, or all become like eyes. No.

You will be powerful in that particular ministry that God has called you for. And don't ever compare yourself with somebody else. Verse 15.

It says here that a hundred and twenty people were gathered together in the upper room on the day of Pentecost. Now I don't know whether you remember, if you have read 1 Corinthians 15 and verse 6, it says after the resurrection of Jesus, 500 believers saw him. And Jesus said, wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit.

Out of 500, only a hundred and twenty waited. Not every believer is interested in the power of the Holy Spirit. Not even in the first century, not even the very first time.

They all believed, they were all born again, they were happy that Jesus rose from the dead. But he said, when he said wait for the Holy Spirit, less than one-third, less than one-fourth were waiting. That's just impossible.

And verse 22, when they are looking for a replacement for Judas Iscariot, notice what they say. We need somebody who should become with us a witness of Jesus' resurrection. Not a witness of Jesus' crucifixion, but a witness of Jesus' resurrection.

Now if you read, you take a concordance and look through the Acts of the Apostles, you'll find that very frequently, I didn't get time to count it up myself, but you can do that. Very frequently you find this phrase, witness of his resurrection. You never find the phrase, witness of his crucifixion.

Why is that? Because if you stop at the crucifixion, you have not completed the gospel. The gospel is Christ died and rose again from the dead. Otherwise it's a very sorrowful gospel, Christ died for our sins.

Now if you listen to average preaching of the gospel today, most evangelists do not preach the resurrection. They preach crucifixion. And even many of you, when you have gone out preaching, you have preached the cross, but you have not preached the resurrection.

And that's the big difference between you and the Apostles. The Apostles preach the resurrection. And now let's get our focus right and say, Lord make me a witness of your resurrection.

A witness who proclaims to the world, not just that Jesus died, but that Jesus rose up from the dead. Very, very important distinction. The reason a lot of Christians are gloomy, is because they don't believe that Jesus rose up from the dead.

I mean they believe it in their heart, but they're not always confessing it. You know it's like Jesus died and he was buried. And then we are like those disciples who are walking to a maze, gloomy, long face.

What a difference there was when they were, when they realized Jesus rose up from the dead. So we are called in this world to be witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Chapter 2, it says here that when they were waiting there, the day of Pentecost came and these people did not know when they were waiting, that in 10 days they would receive.

If they had known it would be 10 days, it would be easy to wait. When God keeps us waiting, he never tells us what is the last day. It may be 10 days, it may be 10 years.

In waiting, we have to wait in faith. Watch and pray, waiting in faith. And there's no faith if you know the end of that waiting period.

So when you pray for something, God does not tell you when the end of that waiting period is going to be. Afterwards when you look back, you say, yeah I had to wait for that for three days, or for the other thing, I had to wait for three years. But faith means I don't know when the end is going to be.

When they were waiting on the Lord in Jerusalem, they did not know it was 10 days. They didn't know whether to be 10 years. They knew they had to wait until they were endued with power from on high.

When you wait on the Lord for the power of the Holy Spirit, wait until you are endued with power from on high. Is this important? It's absolutely important. And if you had gone to those disciples when they were waiting and asked them, how will you know whether you're baptized in the Holy Spirit? What would the

answer be that they would give you? They would not say we would speak in tongues like people say today.

They would say, Jesus said we will receive power. That's how we will know. And then people say, how do you know you've got power? Well, in some way, God will assure us just like God assures us that our sins are forgiven.

Can you explain to an unbeliever how you are so sure that your sins are forgiven? And yet you know deep down in your heart your sins are forgiven? In exactly the same way, the Holy Spirit who bears witness with your spirit that your sins are forgiven can also give you a witness that you have been endued with power. That's how we know. So they were expecting power, but when they got power they also got tongues.

Now the tragedy today is a lot of people have got tongues without power. It's like if you go to the marketplace and go to buy a bottle of Nescafe instant coffee and when you go there the shopkeeper says you can also get a free mug along with that. You didn't go for the mug.

You went for the Nescafe. You went for the power and along with the power, God says you can also have the tongues. That's good and you're so happy.

You went for Nescafe, but you got Nescafe plus the free mug. You went for power, but you got power plus tongues. Now I find two extremes among Christians today.

Some people they go to the shop and they say I don't like mugs. I don't like mugs. I just want the Nescafe.

Okay the shopkeeper says then don't take the mug. Just take the Nescafe and go. And that's what God says.

Some people say I don't like speaking in tongues. Okay don't take it. Take the power and go.

But the more foolish people are the ones who leave the bottle of Nescafe behind and come back with just the mug. Say I got the mug. Brother you spent hundred rupees to get this mug.

That's the folly of today. They've got tongues without power. So we see that power is the identifying mark and never forget that.

The important thing is not the noise and the wind and all those things. No it's the reality of power. You see the it's like getting a gift.

Supposing you get a diamond, very expensive diamond costing many say hundreds of thousands of rupees and it's wrapped up in nice blue paper with red ribbon or it's wrapped up in newspaper. What difference does it make? Do you keep the ribbon or do you keep the diamond? Somebody got it in a newspaper. Somebody got it in a nice package.

It doesn't make a difference. The important thing is the gift inside. Babies are taken up with the wrappings.

Babies are taken up with the external aspects. Oh the wind, the fire, the excitement, the electric shock, the sound, something like that. But the mature people are taken up with the gift which is a diamond.

The power of the Holy Spirit. That's what they, that's what you need to be taken up with. The external wrappings of wind, fire, so many other things like that.

Let God give it in any wrapping he wants so long as you get the power. It says here the tongues of fire sat on everybody's heads which means that the Lord was saying from this day onwards the most important part of this body which I'm going to be using in this new covenant age is the tongue. It has to be set on fire by the Holy Spirit and therefore your tongue must be completely under the control of the Holy Spirit all the time.

Your mother tongue especially or whatever language you speak in. And then they also spoke in other tongues in verse 4. But it's the control of the tongue that is emphasized in verse 3. The tongue under the control of the Holy Spirit 24 hours a day. Do you want your tongue to be used by God in the pulpit? Give your tongue to God 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year and God will test you on that for some time and when he sees that you're faithful with that he will use your tongue when you stand up in the pulpit.

But if you don't give your tongue to God every day of the week and you suddenly expect God to use your tongue when you stand up in the pulpit, I'm sorry he's not going to use it because he does not take your tongue on loan as a rent. You loan out your tongue to God for a few hours and the rest of the time you give it to the devil. No, it must be God's all the time.

Okay, we move on to verse 17. This is the fulfillment Peter says of the prophecy of Joel. Verse 22 and 23 it says about Jesus.

Men of Israel listen. Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs. It's very interesting that the spirit-filled Peter calls Jesus still a man.

A man. Do you know that even today Jesus is a man? He is God but he's not given up his humanity. 1 Timothy 2 4 and 5 says there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

We use the phrase the God-man. He is God and man true. The Bible never uses the phrase God-man.

It says the man Christ Jesus and Peter was not hesitant to call him the man at the right hand of the father. A man attested by the father because he has identified himself with our humanity totally. It's not only when he came to earth, even after his ascension he is still the man Christ Jesus at the right hand of the father.

This man, this is a beautiful verse, verse 23, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross and put him to death and God raised him up again. That means even though you are the fellows who put him to death, it was according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God. That's a tremendous verse.

Predetermined plan, foreknowledge, that means he knew it in advance and you fellows did not know that but God already knew what you're going to do. He had already determined a plan knowing that you're going to kill Jesus. He was going to use it for the salvation of the world.

Now the same thing applies to us. When people harm you, remember Acts 2.23, they're harming you when you go to preach the gospel is according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God. Yeah, that cannot happen to you without the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.

He permits it and that's why he allows somebody to harm you and therefore you can be assured that God's purpose will be fulfilled even in what those people do and just like I've often quoted Romans 8.28, all things work together for good, even the evil that other people do in this way. What is the worst thing that

ever happened in this world, the worst sin that was ever committed on this earth? You know that was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The worst sin that was ever committed on this earth was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Now next question, what is the best thing that ever happened on this earth? Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. That's how our sins are forgiven. So what do we learn from that? That the worst thing that the devil did, God converted into the very best thing and the worst that the devil can do to you, God can also convert into the very best thing because it is according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.

Okay, verse 38, the first time the gospel was preached, this is how Peter preached it. Repent, be baptized and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Today, people do not, when they preach the gospel, they do not preach repentance, they do not preach water baptism, they do not preach baptism of the Holy Spirit.

What do they preach? Believe. Yeah, Peter included believe. If you didn't believe, you don't get baptized but unfortunately in a lot of evangelistic preaching today, there is no mention of repentance because you won't get so many people if you preach repentance but you'll get genuine people.

There's no mention of water baptism because you don't want to offend the people who believe in child baptism. There's no mention of baptism in the Holy Spirit because you don't want to offend the people who don't believe in that. Thank God, Peter was free from all that.

He preached repent, be baptized and you'll receive the Holy Spirit. That's the first time the gospel was preached. They preached the whole counsel of God.

Peter was not a diplomat like today's evangelists trying to please everybody. He only wanted to please God. Be like him and verse 40, he not only preached the gospel, when people responded to the gospel, he told them something more.

With many words, he told them, you've got to be saved from this wretched world. That's the next thing you tell people when they are converted. Be saved from this wretched world system.

Verse 42, and after that these people who are saved continued in the Apostles teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer. It's no use having breaking of bread if you don't have fellowship. Verse 47, the Lord added to their number every day those who are saved.

It's the Lord who adds to the church. I don't have to worry about that part. My part is to proclaim the gospel.

The Lord will add to the church. I can never save souls. My job is to proclaim the word.

The Lord adds to the church. Chapter 3, verse 1, this is the thing which Jesus could never accomplish in his lifetime because the Holy Spirit was not there. Peter and John could never work together in the Gospels.

John would always be with his brother James. In fact, they were trying to get the seats on either side of Jesus in the resurrection. But things have all changed now.

The Holy Spirit has come. Nobody is seeking their own. Nobody is trying to promote himself.

In fact, in Acts 2, verse 11, it says, sorry not 2, 11. It says in Acts chapter 2, verse 14, that when Peter stood up to speak, the heavens were with him. They did not speak.

They did not say, Peter, after you speak, we also want to speak. No. They said, Peter, you speak, that's enough and we are a hundred percent behind you.

Look at that spirit. Greater works than Jesus did. As soon as the Holy Spirit came, they were not interested in seeing who's going to get the honor to speak now.

Let Peter speak. We are solidly behind him. And Peter and John, who never sought a fellowship together like this before, now go together to the hour of prayer.

And in that unity, there is power. Because they find this lame man and he asked for some, he was laid at his, from the mother's womb, he was lame, it says. And he used to be set down every day, verse 2, at the gate of the temple called Beautiful.

And there's another verse in chapter 4, 22, which tells us this man was more than 40 years old. Okay? So this man was brought to sit at the temple probably for 20 years. Every day he was brought there to collect alms and go away.

Now my question is, if he was sitting at the Beautiful gate of the temple for 20 years, did Jesus ever see him? I'm sure Jesus saw him every time he went to the temple, he saw this man asking for alms. And what did Jesus give him? Money. Every time.

He gave him money. See him next week? Money. See him after three years? He gave him money.

Why didn't he heal him? Because he had no leading from the Father to heal him. Some people say Jesus just went around healing everybody. He didn't.

He didn't heal this man. He saw him for three and a half years at the temple, he never healed him. And that teaches us that we're not called to do what the Father never called us to do.

If Jesus had healed him, you know what would have happened? This revival that broke out here in chapter 3 and 4 would not have broken out because that fellow would not be at the temple anymore. He would have been healed long before that. There was a time for that man to be healed and that was not through Jesus but through Peter.

And so Jesus was in touch with the Holy Spirit like most believers are not in touch with the Holy Spirit. They live by rules. Everybody must be healed or nobody must be healed.

Jesus did not live by rules. Those who live by rules are legalistic, can never fulfill the will of God. We have to live by the leading of the Holy Spirit and Jesus was in touch with the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit said don't heal him.

He left him. Give him money. Every time he passed him, he gave him money and thus fulfilled the will of God so that later on when Peter came, Peter said, when he asked Peter for money, Peter said, I don't have money to give you but in the name of Jesus stand up and it says there was such a revival.

5,000 people came to faith. Chapter 5 verse 4. Chapter 4 verse 4. 5,000 people came to salvation because Jesus obeyed the Holy Spirit for three and a half years and did not heal somebody. Wonderful.

That's a tremendous challenge to me that how I can hinder God's work if I go and do something which the Holy Spirit never told me to do. It may be a good work. Healing a man is a very good work.

A lot of good works that people do hinder God's purposes. God's ways are not our ways. The clever man, the man who lives by rules will be a hindrance to God's purposes.

If Jesus had healed that man, he would have hindered God's purposes. A lot of Christians today who listen to principles and rules and live by them are the biggest hindrance to God's purposes. Who is the man who is useful in God's purposes? The man who does not live by rules but listens to the Holy Spirit who may work in one way at one time and a totally different way at another time.

It's more difficult to live like this but that is a spiritual man. A legalistic man lives by rules and regulations. Everybody must be healed or nobody must be healed.

Everybody must be healed at the first opportunity. This is all rules. God's purposes are different.

Chapter 4 we read in verse 8. Then Peter filled with the Holy Spirit. So we see that there was more than once that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and again at the end of the chapter we read they were praying together and verse 31 they were filled with the Spirit again. So between Acts 2 and Acts 4 Peter was filled with the Spirit three times at least which teaches us that the fullness of the Holy Spirit is not a once-for-all experience.

You have to keep on being filled, filled, filled, filled, filled for every ministry you got to keep on being filled. Yesterday's fullness is not good enough for today. Just like people say I was born again on so-and-so date.

I've met lots of people who say I was baptized in the Holy Spirit on such and such a date but I look at their life today there's not a drop of water in their vessel. It's all leaked out ages ago but they got a date. Oh that date.

I feel sorry for all people who quote a quote a date. What's use quoting a date? Are rivers flowing today? Otherwise date date is useless. Maybe you started speaking in tongues today.

You got the mug that day. Where's the bottle of Nescafe? Where's the power? Missing. That's the situation with lots of people today and the devil's fooled them left right and center.

Don't be like them. Don't go around quoting dates. Be filled with the Spirit and everybody will know it.

Acts chapter 4 verse 32 it says the congregation of those who believed before that verse 28 again he uses that expression we found in Acts 2 to do whatever Lord thy hand and thy purpose predestined to occur. He was talking again about the crucifixion of Jesus. The Apostles got a great revelation that the crucifixion of Jesus was according to the predestined plan of God and that affected all their life and they said it to encourage themselves when they were beaten up.

It says here they were beaten and sent and when they got beaten and they said Lord this is all according to your predetermined plan. Praise the Lord and verse 32 the congregation of those who believed were a one heart and one soul. This is how the early church was.

The secret of their power was not only the fullness of the Spirit. The secret of their power was they were a one heart and one soul. They submitted to their leaders.

They submitted to the Apostles and they were completely united. They were not a bunch of gossipers and critics like a lot of Christians today and they did not claim that anything belonging to them was their own. This does not necessarily mean that they sold all their property but they did not say this is mine.

You want it you need it brother here and you can have it. All things were common property to them means you can borrow my scooter. You can have it.

You want a place to stay come and stay in my house. It doesn't mean that they sold their houses. Some people did that and they were free to do it but it was not followed right through to the end of New Testament times.

There was a time when people felt that we should sell our houses and do it but the principle of being one heart and one soul and making sure that not a needy person is there. There was no needy person among them. Verse 34 not even one needy person because those who were houses owners of lands and houses would sell them and bring the proceeds to the Apostles and so nobody remained in need because those who had excess would help those who had less.

This is how the early church lived and their power laid there and in that type of situation you can imagine how some people would like to take advantage of it and Ananias and Sapphira we read in chapter 5 tried to take advantage of it. They said this is good. We can belong to this group.

I mean a lot of people come to our churches also like that because they say oh there are a lot of hospitable people here. There are a lot of generous people here. I'd like to be a part of this church and receive all the generosity of other people and all the hospitality of other people.

Now we got to be very careful. If we start giving out money like that in India you know how your church will grow in size in no time and will get corrupt in no time also because you'll get the wrong type of people. You'll get people who are not interested in righteousness but who are interested in money like they talked about the rice Christians in those days in the old days when people came to the church to get free rice got converted for free education got converted for free medical treatment got converted so that they get get a free trip to the United States something like that.

It hasn't completely gone even today there are people who come to Christian churches for some benefit for themselves which they would not have got if they were in a secular job. You need to always ask yourself when you come to the church have you profited financially by coming to the church? Then you're probably not in the will of God. The church is not a place to make financial profit to make business contacts through the church here and there.

A lot of people who do that and I've always found that they lose out spiritually. So don't take advantage of the church for your own profit. The church is a place to give.

Businessmen will all be driven out of the church one day those who try to make profit out of the church who try to make contacts for their own benefit and gain. The church is a place where we are to give, sacrifice not gain. Unfortunately in India today there are many people in Christian work who are earning five to ten times what they would have earned if they were doing a secular job.

So Christian work has become profitable for them and so all the non-Christians look and say oh these fellows become Christians for the sake of money. How shall we shut their mouths by showing them I'm not doing this for money. I could have made more money in a secular job.

I didn't come here for money I'm earning less than half of what I could have got in my secular job. Then their mouths are shut. But if you are earning five or ten times what you would have got in a secular job how can you shut their mouths? This is the tragedy of Christian work in India today.

So but these people Ananias and Sapphira came in and thought how can we make profit and so they did not give all their money. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was not that they didn't give all their money. God never wanted all their money.

Peter said to them Peter said to Ananias in Acts chapter 5 when your land was not sold verse 4 it was yours. Even after you sold it the money was yours. What do we learn from that? Before you sell your land it is yours.

God doesn't want it. God doesn't want you to sell it. After you sold it the money is still yours.

God doesn't want your money. But why do you tell a lie? That's my question. Why do you pretend? So what was Ananias' sin? Not that he didn't give the whole thing.

Supposing he had come and said well Peter you know we sold that land for 50,000 rupees but my wife and I talked about it and we felt that we should only give 10,000 rupees to God. The rest we want to keep for the future. Peter said wonderful Ananias.

That's good. We're thankful that you decided to give 10,000. God bless you and you'd have been alive and gone home happily giving only 10,000 when everybody else was giving everything.

That was not their sin. Their sin was they stood in the queue kept their mouth shut and pretended that they were giving everything. They didn't open their mouth but Peter was a man of discernment.

He said come here Ananias and afterwards he gave a chance to his wife and said did you sell this for so much? She said yes. Both of them died. For hypocrisy.

Somebody asked me once Brother Zach why doesn't God do that today? I said there'll be hardly anybody alive in the church if God does that today. If God removes all the hypocrites in the church how many will be left? I think there'll still be a few but perhaps not many. But the reason was that they were in the midst of a very powerful church.

You see if Ananias and Sapphira were in some carnal church like Corinth they would not have died. He may have even have been an elder in Corinth. You see it depends which church you're in.

If you're in a dead church you may do a lot of wrong things. You may even be an elder. But you make the big mistake of joining a church that is pressing on to purity and you try to play the fool there.

You're a proud man and you join a bunch of humble brothers who are pressing on to perfection. I tell you God will smite you. One way or the other he'll smite you.

If you want to live go and join some dead church. Please don't join a living church and play the fool there. Because if there is a living church and you go there and try to play the fool to get a reputation for yourself I warn you that God will smite you.

Thankfully there are not many living churches like that so you'll survive in most churches. But if you ever find one be careful don't join it unless you're serious about your Christianity. Can't play the fool there.

I've seen it happen. They don't get smitten physically they get smitten spiritually. Okay Acts chapter 5 there's a lovely verse here verse 29 we must obey God rather than men and verse 41 they rejoiced that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for his name.

We may have a lot of that in India in the days to come and when that happens to us let us rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for his name because it says they called the Apostles verse 40 and flogged them. They took a whip and flogged all the Apostles and when they went away after getting this flogging they didn't just go away with their head down they lifted up their head to say praise the Lord I got a flogging for Jesus sake. They considered a great honor it was like somebody giving them a medal or giving them an honorary doctorate or something like that and they walk away with great joy because they got a flogging for Jesus sake.

That's wonderful. In Acts chapter 6 we read about when the disciples were increasing in number complaints started. See this is the problem whenever a work grows as long as the work is small everything is wonderful but when it begins to grow murmuring starts, grumbling starts, complaining starts and something has to be done about it.

If you allow it to remain like that it will spread. It's like tuberculosis, chicken pox, all these things they spread if you don't isolate the people who've got this sickness. So murmuring and complaining is like that it spreads very very quickly and so the twelve said hey this is not good because the complaint is about food and some people say there's a community difference here that the Jews are favoring their own widows and not taking care of the Grecian widows.

You know it was the problem was on communal lines just like in India sometimes and so the twelve apostles had great wisdom they said we got to sort out this problem but we can't be investigating distribution of food not because it's too lowly a task for us but because we have to give ourselves to prayer. Notice this lovely verse, verse 4. All those who are called to serve the Lord please remember this verse. We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word of God.

That's what we're going to devote ourselves to and we're not going to sit down and sit in a table as a director and keep signing letters. There are a lot of people called to preach God's Word are doing that. I know many times the devil has tried to draw me by some offer of a job here in Christian organizations sit behind the desk and sign letters and I said no thank you no matter what the salary is we cannot do that.

We are called to the minister of the Word and I want to say if you are not being gifted there are many people who are not gifted to minister the Word. Their gift is administration. Let them go and sit at tables.

If you are called to minister the Word of God and that's the gift God's given you don't ever degenerate to the level of being some director or something like that sitting at a table. Go out and be a prophet. Don't be a director of some organization signing letters.

That's what the Apostle said. We're not going to serve tables and but who's going to serve the tables? You need spirit-filled people. So look for people of a good testimony filled with the Holy Spirit who do that job but that's not our calling.

You see the Apostle stuck to their calling. That's why they fulfilled their ministry and the other calling is also important but somebody called to it must do it but they must be filled with the Holy Spirit. So they selected seven people Stephen and Philip and you know Stephen and Philip are the ones you read off

later on who became great preachers.

Stephen became the first martyr. Philip was the one who went to Samaria and brought a revival there. So these people didn't just look after serving food.

They started with that like Elisha poured water on the hands of Elijah but they moved on to higher ministries when they were faithful with serving food to the widows and it says here the Apostles prayed for them laid hands on them and the Word of God kept on spreading. Here's a lovely verse which we can claim for ourselves. It says in verse 10 that when Stephen spoke the others were unable to cope with the wisdom and the spirit with which Stephen spoke and that can be our experience too that when we speak we speak with wisdom and the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 7 we read about the history of Israel that Stephen was speaking and finally he told them verse 52 which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute. He's saying every single prophet your father's persecuted. You did not they did not spare one of them and that verse teaches us that every prophet in the Old Testament was unpopular.

Every prophet was rejected. That's why Jesus said leap for joy when all men speak evil of you because that's how they treated all the prophets. A prophet is different from a teacher.

A teacher may be accepted a prophet is usually not accepted. A teacher is a non-controversial figure. If a prophet is non-controversial he's not a prophet.

A prophet is always a controversial figure whether it is Moses or Elijah or Elisha or anybody. So the prophets are always persecuted. Teachers and evangelists are not necessarily persecuted as much and he says now you'll kill the last one who came as a prophet that's Jesus Christ and these people got so mad.

Verse 54 Stephen preached in such a way that he really worked them up and they were cut to the quick and they began to grind their teeth. Have you had anybody grinding their teeth when you're preaching? Well that's what Stephen had. He was like a prophet spoke to them.

They were sitting there mad at this man preaching and decided to destroy him and they got a lot of false witnesses and they took him outside and threw stones at him and killed him. The first martyr of the Christian Church killed for preaching the Word of God and see this wonderful verse. He being full of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 55 here is a mark of people who are filled with the Spirit. They gaze intently to heaven. A spirit-filled man gazes at heaven and gazes intently.

A spirit-filled man sees the glory of God. Doesn't care for the opposition of men. A spirit-filled man sees Jesus standing in the right hand of God.

Verse 56 a spirit-filled man testifies to this Jesus whom he sees at the right hand of God. And verse 57 a spirit-filled man is usually persecuted and often killed. And we read here that they laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul and Saul was agreeing to this killing of Stephen that is the Apostle one who became the Apostle Paul and Stephen his last words were Lord receive my spirit and do not hold this sin against them.

A spirit-filled man commits his soul to God and a spirit-filled man forgives other people who harm him. It's a wonderful description of what it means to be filled with the Spirit from verse 55 to verse 60. He forgives those who hurt him.

Now once Saul saw this why did God allow the killing of Stephen? I believe that was the first step to the conversion of the Apostle Paul. I wonder whether Paul would ever have been converted if he had not seen the way Stephen reacted when he was killed. Saul had seen many people being stoned to death perhaps but he'd never seen one like Stephen.

When the Roman centurion who had seen many people being crucified saw Jesus the way Jesus was crucified without cursing without spitting without swearing he said this is the Son of God I have never seen anybody die like this. And when Peter when Paul Saul saw the way Stephen died he said this is different this cannot be a false religion something is wrong maybe I'm wrong and it began to prick him and that's why later on on the Damascus Road Paul the Lord spoke to him it is hard for you Saul to kick against the pricks of conscience. When did those pricks of conscience start? When he saw the way Stephen died.

The way you react to the evil somebody does to you may begin the pricks of conscience in somebody watching you and in these last 2,000 years there are many people who have opposed Christianity in many many places who have been first drawn to Christ by the way they have seen Christians react to persecution. So Saul was just one of the first of those hundreds and thousands of converts through 2,000 years who got saved through seeing a godly reaction to persecution. For that we must be filled with the spirit you cannot have a godly reaction to persecution if you are not filled with the spirit.

So Stephen is a unique example for us in India and Saul was in agreement and he went around persecuting people. In chapter 8 we read in verse 12 about the great revival that came in Samaria through Philip preaching and there was a magician there and it says in verse chapter 8 and verse 20 that sorry chapter 8 and verse 13 that this magician also believed and was baptized but when Peter came it says Peter laid hands on the people because verse 15 they were only born again and they had not been baptized in the Holy Spirit. So they said Peter came Philip could not lead them into the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Philip could only lead them to salvation, forgiveness of sins and to baptism. He would not have baptized them if they were not converted. They were converted and then they were baptized but they were not baptized in the Holy Spirit.

So when Peter and John came they prayed for them verse 15 that they should receive the Holy Spirit because he had not yet fallen on any of them. They had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and then they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Just a word about this baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus said baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. No name there and you know even in heathen religions they have a Trinity. So when we baptize it's important that we identify that our Trinity is not Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

It is the Trinity connected with Jesus Christ and therefore when I baptize I baptize in the name of the Father and the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Why? I am saying I believe not in that Trinity, all the heathen trinities there are in the world, but the Trinity where the Son is the Lord Jesus Christ. So that's what Jesus commanded and at the same time identifying the Son as Jesus Christ means

it is a baptism in the name of Jesus.

It does not mean like many people do today where they deny the Father and the Holy Spirit and baptize only in the name of Jesus. That's not what the Apostles did. And then they laid hands on them, verse 17, and they received the Holy Spirit.

And when Simon saw that you could get the Spirit, that the Spirit was bestowed through laying on of hands, he gave money. See here is an example of a person, perhaps the first person in the Christian history who tried to get something spiritual by giving money. And Peter refused to receive that money.

He says your gift perish with you because you thought you could get the gift of God by money. Do you know that there are many rich people who try to bribe preachers today with money? Simon was a rich man. Don't allow any rich man to bribe you with money.

And if you sense that that man's heart is not right, give it right back. That's what Peter said. I don't want your money.

Be careful about whom you receive money from. Peter did receive money from different people, but not from Simon. We need to be discerning.

If you love money so much, you'll just receive it from anybody and everybody. Receiving money as a servant of the Lord is an act of fellowship. I would receive, but not from everyone.

There are people from whom I've said I'm sorry. I usually tell them I don't need it, brother. I'm okay.

I don't want to insult them. But I don't feel free to receive from certain people. And Peter didn't feel free to receive from Simon because there was no fellowship.

And the Lord said, Peter said your money perish with you. And as I said earlier in the middle of that revival, the Lord told Peter to go to the desert. Verse 26.

There in the desert, he meets this Ethiopian eunuch who gets converted and takes the gospel to Ethiopia. In chapter 9, we read of the conversion of Saul. On the road to Damascus, he gets hit by this light and blinded.

And the question he asked Jesus is, in the King James version, it is there, Lord, what will you have me to do? Lord, what will you have me to do? Verse 5. Who are you, Lord? What will you have me to do? Two questions in the NASB doesn't come in the King James version. You get it. And Paul says it later on in his testimony.

There were two questions he asked the Lord. Who are you, Lord? What do you want me to do? Two questions that he kept on asking all through life. Who are you, Lord? I want to know you better.

To know Christ is the passion of my life. Second question, I want to know your will. What do you want me to do? And the Lord did not give him a whole plan as to where all he's going to go.

He gave him a little inkling that he is going to suffer, but he said, go into the city and I'll tell you what to do. God leads us step by step. You say, Lord, what do you want me to do? The Lord says, for the time being, verse 6, just go to the city.

That's all. And when you go to the city, I'll tell you what to do next. God leads us step by step.

And when he went to the city, there was another man whom God spoke in Damascus called Ananias. See, it's wonderful to see how these people were sensitive to the Spirit. The Lord said to Ananias, verse 10, Ananias, and he said, here I am, Lord.

The Lord said, go to that city called, street called Straight. There's a man there called Saul of Tarsus. He's praying and he's fasting.

He is not eating and drinking. From verse 9, it says he didn't eat and drink for three days and you'll see him. And I've already given him a vision that a man called Ananias will come and pray for him.

Go. And Ananias had some questions, but he went. See, when the Lord sends you somewhere, what we learn from this is the Lord is already preparing people at the other end to receive your ministry.

If you go on your own, you don't know whether the Lord has prepared somebody at the other end or not. But here you see the Lord sent Ananias and he says, don't worry, I've prepared that man and he'll receive your word. It's a wonderful thing to be one of those who spends your time listening to God.

And he went, Ananias, his humble unknown brother, you never hear of him again. He went and laid hands on the man who was to be the greatest apostle in the world and said, Paul, God wants you to be filled with the Holy Spirit. You were converted.

You were born again on that road to Damascus. Now you need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. See, this was so important.

All those disciples realized it. It's not enough to be converted. You've got to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

And immediately his eyes were opened and he took some food and he was strengthened. And I just want to say one last thing from chapter 9. When they were threatening his life, verse 25, he had to be lowered in a basket through a window. This great man who was going to be the greatest apostle in the world.

And he mentioned that in 2nd Corinthians 11 saying, you know, God humbled me. Can you imagine this man sitting in a basket and escaping for his life. You know, in the previous chapter you read how God lifted Peter, lifted Philip and took him off to another place.

Snatched Philip away, Acts 8 39. God could have done that for Paul when the people were surrounding Damascus to kill him. God's way is not always the same.

Sometimes we have to go in a very humiliating way to escape from our enemies. Let's thank God that he's in control. Saves us one way or the other.

Let's pray.

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