

Bible Study 17 – Acts 5:12-16 – Mission and Ministry

We pick up where we left off last week. We are in Acts chapter 5 and today our focus will be on verses 12 through 16. The theme of this passage is mission and ministry, and it is particularly germane in light of the pronouncements of the recent General Assembly on the subject.

This will be the last of our online Bible Studies until after the summer holiday break. And whether we will continue online or resume our Study in a less formal fashion in the church, time will tell. Notice however will be given online and in our Sunday worship services. So do watch for that. Given the interactive nature of our usual Bible Study when we gather in the lounge or hall, it will probably be best left until the mandate on mask-wearing is lifted.

Let us turn to our text. We read: Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. 13 None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. 14 And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 15 so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. 16 The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

1. Firstly, let us see how affirmation of apostolic power was seen in miraculous healings: Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles.

a) The miraculous signs and wonders by the hands of the apostles were God's affirmation and approval of their special and unique status and authority as the founding fathers or pillars of Christ's church... That foundation became their teaching and example recorded for future generations and forever in the New Testament scriptures which together with the Old Testament make up the Bible as the authentic and authoritative word of the living God... entrusted to and explained or expounded by the church...

b) The miraculous signs and wonders by the hands of the apostles were God's affirmation of his anointing and appointing them to this gracious and glorious ministry to and for the Word Incarnate, Jesus Christ. Hence the supernatural or miraculous healings were 'signs' pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In other words, they pointed to a deeper reality. They directed all to the source of healing and wholeness; of forgiveness and favour; of renewal and righteousness. They are described as wonders and therefore elevate our thought to the One who is altogether wonderful, and gracious, and loving, and merciful. He is our Helper and our Healer. And he is here working through his apostles who did all in Jesus, name (authority or power).

c) The miraculous signs and wonders by the hands of the apostles were affirmation of the good news that they came to communicate to all. The gospel is not only to be believed but it becomes the source of our being and belonging. It seeks the betterment of people. And it is not merely theoretical or spiritual in its application, but it transforms how we view and treat one another as made in the image and likeness of God.

Despite the intimidation and threats from the religious and political authorities, the apostles continued to communicate the gospel of Christ and care for others. Such is an affirmation of their love for God and their neighbour.

2. Consider too the announcement of good news made through the apostles' missionary endeavour: And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. 13 None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. 14 And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women...

a) The apostles gathered and made use of the place of worship which was the Temple in Jerusalem. The Lord Jesus had also taught there, and it was likely special to the apostles for

that reason. Practically, it was also the place that people gathered to worship God. Their witness however did not end there but it was an ideal place to preach and teach in its colonnades to all that would lend an ear.

The church also proclaimed the good news in one another's houses as well as outdoors in public areas. As an aside, it is often said by us Protestant Christians today that we should abandon our church buildings on the premise that the early church never had any. Of course, economic necessity is the driver behind this initiative. What we can say is that the early church did meet in designated places (houses). And the reason they never had buildings of their own initially was that they were prohibited by law from doing so. When the law changed in the 2nd or 3rd century, church buildings were universally erected for the ease of worship and teaching for the church – the body of Christ in a particular locality! No, such buildings are not essential, but they do enhance and enrich our worship and provide a place set apart for that purpose. And the older ones are particularly helpful in communicating the Christian message via their architecture and furnishings.

b) The apostles gained a good reputation for their conviction, confidence, commitment, and courage in communicating Jesus Christ in word and work. They were hugely respected by the people for their dedication to Christ's cause and kingdom...

c) The church continued to grow because of the apostles' witness and work. Christ was working in them and through them by his Spirit. Fulfilling his promise, 'I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her.' Multitudes of men and women received and rested in Jesus through the labours of the church. The Great Commission continues, and the message and methodology are unchanging!

3. Let us also note the alleviation of suffering through the apostolic ministry of care: 15 so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them.

a) People naturally responded to the apostolic church's ministry of care... Such was the need... spiritual, psychological, and physical...

b) People recognised God's grace and his prophetic power at work in and through Peter and his fellow apostles...

c) People realised that the apostles' in faithfully implementing Christ's instructions were seeking their good and God's glory...

4. Finally, let us note how the acknowledgement and accreditation of the apostolic ministry spread: The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

a) The good news of apostolic doctrine (teaching) and doing spread beyond the confines of Jerusalem which should come as no surprise. People travelling to and from the Holy City and its Temple took word back home of what they had seen and heard...

b) The good news of apostolic doctrine and doing prompted a reaction in people who brought those in need of healing and wholeness in body, mind, and spirit to the apostles...

c) The good news of apostolic doctrine and doing exclaimed, elevated, and exalted the name of Jesus near and far... in trust and obedience to his Great Commission.

Questions

1) What was the purpose of the apostolic signs and wonders?

2) Should we expect 'signs and wonders' today? What are they?

3) The church is to gather for worship and teaching and then go in mission and ministry. In what ways are we doing this today?

4) How do we cultivate an apostolic and catholic Christ-centred approach to worship, work, and witness?