

Persecution; Discipline; Growth.

Acts 5:12-16 NIV

Following Luke's contrast between Barnabas' sacrificial giving and Ananias' plot to deceive the church, another summary begins in verse 12 of Acts 5.

Before we dive in to this summary, I want to review. Repletion is one of the ways we learn and remember. Luke is writing a letter to Theophilus. We are reading short sections of his letter at a time over many weeks. Review will keep the flow of the letter in tact.

Beginning his letter to Theophilus, Luke takes us to that 50-day period of time between our Lord's resurrection and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. Over 40 days, Jesus revealed Himself to many in very convincing ways. He left unanswered specific questions regarding the timing of His return and the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, but commanded that the gospel be taken to the ends of the earth. After he ascended into heaven, the apostles gathered together to wait, devoting themselves to prayer, and choosing Matthias as the replacement for Judas, bringing to an end what we call chapter 1 of Acts.

Acts 2: the Spirit of God came as promised. The Good News was preached, and the believers began to gather for the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. These new believers were responsive to the financial needs of their brothers and sisters, even to

the point of disposing of their own possessions to meet these needs.

On their way to the temple for prayer, Peter and John heal a beggar in the name of Jesus and preached the Good News to the crowd that gathered in amazement. Peter made it clear in his preaching that Jesus was the promised Messiah, that He had been falsely accused, convicted, and crucified. He further declared that God had raised Jesus from the dead. To be saved, men must confess their sin and believe in Jesus as the promised Messiah. This ends Acts chapter 3.

This Good News was not good news for the Jewish religious leaders, especially the Sadducees. They were the most threatened by the preaching of the apostles. They had played a key role in the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus, they held the positions of power in Israel, and they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They had Peter and John arrested and put in jail overnight, and then brought them to stand trial before the Sanhedrin the next morning.

The main problem for the Sanhedrin was the undeniable miracle. Peter and John made it clear that the credit for this miracle went to Jesus, and they would not stop spreading the Good News.

When Peter and John were released, they returned to their fellow believers and

had a prayer meetin.' The following is the request part of the prayer and result:

Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. (Acts 4:29-31)

The powers of darkness through the efforts of men would not stop the spread of the Good News. Persecution was considered fulfillment of God's Word, and ignited a desire to do more; give more; praise more--- we are introduced to Barnabas, Son of Encouragement, as an example.

But, the powers of darkness did not stop with threats. They found a weakness; Ananias and Sapphira – who were not as noble as Barnabas. They sold a piece of land, but kept back a portion of the sale price for themselves, but claimed they gave all. Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3)--- Both husband and wife died because of their hypocrisy. News of this brought great fear on those who heard, believers and unbelievers alike.

This brings us to the next summary in the letter. If a first time reader would stop and reflect on all that has happened to this point and consider the supernatural divine discipline on this husband and wife's conspiracy, the reader might conclude that the growth of the church would slow down.

But, just the opposite is true. As with the persecution, this discipline ignited a desire to do more; give more; praise more whole-heartedly.

Luke writes: **The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade.** ¹³ **No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.** ¹⁴ **Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.** ¹⁵ **As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by.** ¹⁶ **Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.** (Acts 5:12-16)

Luke's summary includes the answer to prayer. In response to the arrest of Peter and John, the Jerusalem saints had prayed that God would **"Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."** (Acts 4:30).

Growth across the board: more signs and wonders, more worship and praise at

the Temple, more and more men and women believed. The Good News spread outside Jerusalem. More sick and demon possessed were healed.

A couple of things I want to touch on in this summary: the first being what appears to be a contradiction between vss 13 and 14; **No one else dared join them,--- more and more men and women believed...**

I take verse 13 to be in reference to where the believers were meeting in verse 12; Solomon's Colonnade. If there were other groups meeting in the Temple when the believers were there, the believers had Solomon's Colonnade all to themselves.

This may also indicate that if the believers were coming to the colonnade during the regular times of prayer, that mostly prayer and worship would happen at the Temple, and most evangelism would happen from house to house.

Here is what I mean by that: rather than one of the apostles announcing that an evangelistic meeting would be held at the 3 o'clock prayer time in the Temple or at Billy Joe's house on Straight Street, the meetings would be more spontaneous-directed by the Holy Spirit. For example: Peter and John did not go to the Temple that day to heal a beggar. They were going to pray. The Holy Spirit directed the healing and the preaching that followed.

Verse 13 could also indicate that the half-hearted kept their distance.

The next thing I want to mention is the beds and mats in verse 15. Why mention

two? Luke, being a detail person, may be indicating class here. Pallets or cots; beds or mattresses. This may be like saying that the people came in Mercedes and Pintos, but it didn't matter – all were healed, regardless of social standing.

Healed even by Peter's shadow? Oh, my! What do we do with this? Conservatives wrinkle their faces and Pentecostals shout, 'Wooooo!'

Was this just superstition on the part of the crowds? Do we have anything like this mentioned anywhere else?

In John 5, the blind, the lame, the paralyzed were laid by the pool of Bethesda. They believed that from time to time an angel of the Lord would come and stir the water. The first one in the pool after the disturbance would be healed of whatever disease they had. There is no indication that this worked or didn't work.

We know that Jesus healed by touch, just speaking, or by people just touching him at times.

But, here is the passage that may shed the most light on Peter's shadow healing people:

Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹² **Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.** ¹³ **And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.** ¹⁴ **You**

may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. (John 14:11-14)

Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” (Acts 4:30).

They prayed and greater works came: remember that the signs and wonders were done to verify that the work was from God. Miracles were not just to show off power, but to verify the Good News that Jesus rose from the dead.

Now, think about Peter’s shadow in light of this passage:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Whose shadow was it, really?

Peter’s shadow was a shadow of a transformed man, a man hand picked by Jesus to be an apostle, and given the promise along with the others to do greater works.

Jesus was doing the healing through Peter’s shadow – or you could say it was Jesus’ shadow cast from a transformed Peter. Either would be correct.

But rather than focusing on this shadow healing, think about what is not said; think about the result of all these people being brought to Jerusalem to be healed. They would eventually go home.

Do you remember when Jesus would heal someone and then tell them not to tell

anyone? What happened? Did they keep quiet?

These people left home infirm and were going to return home whole. Would that raise some questions?

Even if they said nothing – how about a fella who was carried all the way to Jerusalem on a mat, but sprinted all the way back home – would that draw attention?

Every spring, hundreds of Hollywood “stars” gather for the Academy Awards. Very few “slip in the back door:” instead, they make an entrance. They walk down the long red carpet, smiling at the cameras and waving to the people in the stands (who, by the way, all had to apply and go through extensive background checks), showing off their clothing (and undoubtedly a bit more), chatting with the reporters. Some will go to great, great lengths just to be noticed.

Contrast that with Jesus: to the man healed of leprosy in Matt. 8, He said: “See that you don’t tell anyone.” To the two blind men He healed in Matt. 9, He, “warned them sternly, ‘See that no one knows about this.’” And in Mark 1, a demon possessed man in Capernaum yelled out “I know who you are – the Holy One of God!”, to which Jesus replied “Be quiet!”

Jesus often chose not to be in the limelight. In fact, most of Jesus ministry happened outside of the capital city of Jerusalem, away from the big pomp and ceremony of the Temple, in small towns and villages along the way.

But now, beginning in the Temple, the Good News is preached. Time for quiet is over. The apostles and the believers are in the limelight. People are bringing friends and family to them to be healed.

Signs and wonders from the apostles continue to draw attention to the resurrection message. Their numbers grew as well as respect from the people.

The discipline of Ananias and Sapphira sent a clear message that running with this group was not for the half-hearted.

The news spread beyond the walls of Jerusalem. For a while, hundreds upon hundreds lined the streets where Peter would travel. Luke indicates that all of them were healed – by shadow or apostle, Jesus did the healing.

Persecution didn’t stop them, divine discipline inspired them – the result; more growth; a desire to do more; give more; praise more.

When persecution is considered a privilege, then preaching will not cease, even when threatened for continuing to proclaim the good news of the gospel. It is the fear of persecution that silences some, but when rightly understood, persecution for the sake of Christ is an incentive for preaching. Luke tells us that the apostles not only left the Sanhedrin with smiles on their faces, but with praise in their hearts. They had been honored to suffer for the name of Jesus. They would not stop preaching in His name and proclaiming the good news that salvation was available only through Jesus.