



Luke-Acts

Vol. 7

Luke-Acts Study Guide Volume 7

Introduction

From December 2019 through November 2020 we will be working our way through the 52 chapters of the Gospel of Luke and Books of Acts. Since I cannot cover all of the material in my sermons on Sundays, this study guide is designed to help you get the most of our Luke-Acts series. This study guide will be published every four to six weeks throughout the series.

Each week includes the reading for that week, some commentary from me, some questions for reflection and discussion, and some family activities. The study guide is primarily intended for individual and family use, but can be adapted for small groups.

I encourage you to complete these readings prior to each Sunday morning in order to help you prepare for each week's sermon. I look forward to all of you joining me on this journey through Luke-Acts.

Week 28: Leading up to Sunday, June 7

Weekly Reading: Acts 3

Acts 3:1-10 Peter Heals a Lame Beggar

We are off and running into the book of Acts. This reading tells us about the first post-Jesus miracle.

As Peter and John were going into the temple, they met a beggar who had been lame from birth. At this time, there was no such thing as government programs, disability payments, or even charitable organizations as we know them today. So, if you were disabled and your family could not take care of you, the only thing you could really do was beg. Public begging would have been considered perfectly acceptable during this time and giving money to them would have been a regular act of charity people would have engaged in.

Peter and John wanted to help the man, but they did not have any money. Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Peter took the man by the hand, helped him to stand, and he began walking, jumping, and praising God.

Needless to say, this began to draw a crowd. Everyone had seen the beggar sitting there every day, maybe for years. Many of them may have given him money themselves. Others may have gone out of their way to ignore him. In any case, they all knew who he was and something amazing had happened. As we will see in the next section, Peter does not waste the opportunity.

Leaders of organizations who work with those in need tell us that it is not a good idea to give money to individual beggars, because doing so will enable them to continue in destructive behavior and discourage them of taking advantage of the help available to them. Instead, if we want to help, we should contribute money and other resources to these organizations.

While we should not give money to individuals, that does not mean we ignore them. We can take the time (if we feel safe doing so) to stop and talk to them, encourage them, pray with them, and maybe direct them to some place that can help them. Now, not all of them are really going to appreciate that approach but, like Peter, it is giving them what we have to meet their needs.

Questions for Reflections/Discussion:

1. If we should not give money directly to individual beggars, what do we have that we can give to them?

Acts 3:11-26

In the last section we saw how Peter and John healed the lame beggar at the temple. This event very quickly drew a crowd and Peter did not waste the opportunity to preach to the people. This is Peter's second recorded sermon in the book of Acts.

This sermon, like many in Acts, has some basic elements. First, it cites Old Testament scriptures, which point to Jesus as the Messiah. Second, it identifies Jesus as the Messiah. Third, it proclaims Jesus' death for the forgiveness of sins, his resurrection, and his promise to return. Finally, it extends the opportunity to repent, believe in God, have forgiveness for sins, and eternal life.

In this sermon, forgiveness is offered in verse 17 when Peter said, "Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders." An invitation to respond comes in verse 19 when Peter says, "Repent then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped

out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”

Each and every believer should be able to share enough of the Gospel to lead someone else to salvation and should look for opportunities to do so. This sermon from Peter is the second example, so far, in the book of Acts of how to do that. There will be many others. First, we need to tell people who Jesus is: the Son of God, the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. Second, we tell them what Jesus did: he died for our sins and rose again, ascended into heaven, and will return one day. Finally, we invite them to repent, believe, be forgiven and be saved. Anybody can do that.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

1. Have you ever shared the Gospel with someone? What would it take for you to do so?

Week 28 Family Activity Ideas:

Bubbling Over: You will need some pop, cups, sugar, a teaspoon, plates, and paper towels (you decide how much depending if everyone tries or you have one example). Fill a cup about half full with pop. This pop is already sweet and good. What do you think will happen if we add sugar to it? Let's see (add a tsp. of sugar and stir). The pop will bubble up. What effect did the sugar have? Just like Peter and John helped the beggar, we can help others with what God has shared with us. We don't have to give money, just a kind word, smile, or prayer can bubble over from us onto someone who needs it. There's plenty of God's goodness to go around!

Too Good: Make a delicious treat you know your kids will enjoy. When you are finished, announce, "I have good news! I've made this delicious treat...and now I'm going to eat it all myself!" Hopefully your family will complain about how unfair that is. Agree that your treat is definitely too good not to share. The Gospel is very much the same; it's way too good not to share! Practice telling others who Jesus is and what he did for us (as Brian discussed in the Acts 3:11-26 entry).

Week 29: Leading up to Sunday, June 14

Weekly Reading: Acts 4

Acts 4:1-31 Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin

Peter's sermon gets a response from the crowd. Let's do the math. On the day of Pentecost there are 120 followers of Jesus gathered in the upper room. After Peter's first sermon, in Acts 2, 3000 were added. After Peter's second sermon, which we read about last week, Acts 4:4 tells us that the number of believers had grown to 5000.

Now the authorities have taken notice. There is a pattern in these first chapters of the book of Acts. There is a miraculous event, like Pentecost or the healing of the lame beggar, followed by a sermon, followed by an enthusiastic response, followed by persecution.

As a result of the miracle, the sermon, and the response which followed it, Peter and John find themselves being brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious ruling body. When the Sanhedrin asked Peter and John to explain themselves, Peter gave a bold testimony to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He goes on to say salvation can be found in no other name except the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12). The Sanhedrin was astonished with their bold and eloquent words, made possible through the power of the Holy Spirit, even though they were not trained theologians like they were. The Sanhedrin could not quite figure out what to do. They could not very well deny the miracle, it happened in public, but they also didn't want this "Jesus talk" to spread. So, after deliberation, they brought Peter and John back in and told them not to teach about Jesus anymore. Peter and John inform them they are going to obey God and continue preaching, but the Sanhedrin, because they could not do anything else, let them go anyway. When Peter and John return to the gathering of believers, the believers pray and are refreshed in the Holy Spirit.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

1. Why do you think the Sanhedrin were so threatened by the Gospel?
2. In what ways is the Gospel a threat to political and religious power today?

3. Thankfully, Christians are not persecuted in the United States today, we are not being tortured and killed for our faith, but are we prepared to face that if it should happen?

Acts 4:32-37 The Believers Share Their Possessions

This passage describes the generosity of the early church. It says that no one considered anything they owned as really belonging to them and, from time to time, one of the believers would sell some of their property and bring all of the money to the church to be distributed to those who were in need. One such person was a believer called Barnabas, who sold a field that he had owned and brought all the money and laid it at the feet of the Apostles.

This is difficult for us to understand. Is the Bible saying all of us have to sell everything we have and redistribute it?

I would say the mistake we are making in this passage is failing to read it closely. We see that ALL the believers had generous hearts, hearts to help one another. We see that none of them considered their property as ultimately belonging to them. This the Christian concept of stewardship, everything we own does not really belong to us, it belongs to God. God has given it to us to care for ourselves, to meet our own needs and those of our families, and then to share with others. Some believers felt called to, and were in a financial and family situation to be able to, sell excess property and give all of the proceeds to the church. This was completely voluntary. Nobody in the church was required to do this.

Everyone was called to be compassionate and generous. Some were in a position to be more generous than others, but all of it was voluntary. We are going to see in the next chapter that generosity, or at least the attempt to appear generous, can lead to pride and have disastrous results.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

1. In what ways is God calling you to be more generous? Is there some extra in your life you could do without in order to be more generous?

Week 29 Family Activity Ideas:

Strength in Christ- Get enough craft sticks or popsicle sticks for each child to have about 6 (If you don't have craft sticks, you may want to get a package of popsicles and save the sticks...all of Family Worship!). Ask the child or children to break 1 popsicle stick. Then give them 2 to stack together and ask them to break it. If they are able, then give them 3. Continue until they are unable to break the stack. Tell kids this is an example of Peter and John in front of the Sanhedrin, after they had been put into prison. Alone, they may have been scared or not known what to say, but with the Holy Spirit's help, they were able to stand up to the Sanhedrin and spread God's word. They were eventually just released because of the power of the Holy Spirit. Just as the popsicle sticks are stronger together, we are stronger with Christ.

A Little Goes a Long Way: This activity will teach kids about generosity and how a little can go a long way, as well as patience! Sonia has portions of starter for Amish Friendship Bread. If you've never done it before, it will start as a 1-cup portion of bread starter. For 10 days you will mash the ziploc bag and occasionally add some flour, sugar, and milk. At the end of 10 days, the starter will have grown into 4 or 5 1-Cup portions. 3 or 4 of the 1-Cup portions can be given away to friends and family to make their own and give away to their friends and family. Your family can keep 1 and make some delicious bread! Contact Sonia at soniabaker@wesleyonline.org for your starter bread, directions, and bread recipe!

Week 30: Leading up to Sunday, June 21

Weekly Reading: Acts 5

Acts 5:1-11 Ananias and Sapphira

This is one of the most difficult, if not the most difficult, stories in all of the New Testament. Last week we saw that some of the believers felt led to sell property and give all of the money to the church for the support of the poor. This no doubt brought those believers much praise and attention, even if they did not want it. Well, human nature being what it is, anywhere there is praise and attention, there will be people seeking it, even if they have to be dishonest to do so.

Such is the case with Ananias and his wife, Sapphira. They own an excess piece of property, which they decided to sell and say they gave all the money to the church. However, in truth, they keep some of it for themselves. Peter, however, knew, by the Holy Spirit, Ananias was lying, not just to people, but to God. Peter reminds Ananias he was under no compulsion to sell the property and, having sold it, was under no compulsion to give any of the money to the church, much less all of it. This generosity was, as we said last week, strictly voluntary. The sin was not in withholding the money; the sin was in lying about it. When he hears this, Ananias drops dead, perhaps literally, from embarrassment and some guys in the church just take him out and bury him.

And now, for what I find is the funniest part. Three hours later, his wife Sapphira shows up. Nobody had told her that her husband was dead and buried! She shows back up at church and Peter asks her about the situation, giving her an opportunity to tell the truth, but she does not. She dies and is buried beside her husband.

This seems like a very harsh punishment. After all, what is so bad about fibbing a little bit about how much money you gave to the church? However, something deeper may have been going on here. Ananias and Sapphira may well have been trying to elevate their position of influence and authority in the church. Over the years as a pastor, I have found that there are two kinds of people in the church: there are people who give and there are people who talk about giving. The people who talk about giving are usually trying to manipulate me or the church in order to get their way. Perhaps that is what was going on here. While fibbing about the amount of your offering may not be a big deal, attempting to manipulate and control the church certainly is.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

1. Have you known anyone who has tried to appear more generous than they actually were, or anyone who has tried to manipulate the church with their giving?

Acts 5:12-42 More Healing and More Persecution

Even after the unfortunate event involving Ananias and Sapphira, the church continued to meet and the apostles continued to perform signs and wonders, including healings. People were afraid, yet

still attracted, to the church and it continued to grow. These signs and wonders, and the continued growth of the church, would lead to yet another incident of persecution because of the jealousy of the religious leaders.

The apostles (we are not told which ones) were arrested and put in jail. During the night, an angel released them. In the morning, they went to the temple and continued teaching. They were brought before the Sanhedrin once more and asked why they continued to teach when they had been told not to. The apostles replied that they had to obey God rather than human authority.

As the Sanhedrin was trying to figure out what to do with the apostles, a wise old rabbi named Gamaliel spoke up. He said, basically, if what they are doing is not of God, then it will die out on its own, but if it is of God, then they could not stand in its way.

So, the Sanhedrin called the apostles back in, beat them, warned them again, and sent them on their way. The apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing, because they had been found worthy to be beaten for the name of Jesus and continued teaching in the temple and from house to house.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

1. Why do you think the Sanhedrin was so committed to stopping the apostles?
2. How do you think we can apply Gamaliel's advice to the various divisions of the religious world today?

Week 30 Family Activity Ideas:

Out of Control: Go on a walk with your family. While you walk, see if you can find weeds, especially in areas where people don't want them (ex: in flower beds). Talk about how weeds will grow and grow, and often spread, unless someone pulls them up by the roots. Lies can be a lot like weeds, they will continue to get bigger and it can also become a habit so there are more and more. Soon there are a lot of weeds and things start to not look as nice and good things can't grow where the weeds are. If you lie a lot, people won't be able to trust you and we aren't being the person God created us to be or showing others who God is through our actions.

Dominoes for Jesus: No matter what problem the apostles were up against, they continued to tell others about Jesus and all He could do for their lives. They also performed miracles that led many people to Christ. We have the same job the apostles did, to spread the love of Jesus. As a family, build a domino creation (as simple or complex as you choose). When you knock the dominoes over, tell kids this is how we spread the news of Jesus, one person at a time. It doesn't always have to be by our words, our actions can do the same thing and cause others to want to follow the Jesus you know.

Week 31: Leading up to Sunday, June 28

Weekly Reading: Acts 6

Acts 6:1-15 The Choosing of the Seven and the Arrest of Stephen

Today we see the first instance of conflict in the early church. There were no Gentiles in the church by this time, they were all Jewish people. However, there were two distinct groups of Jewish people: the Hellenistic Jews (Greek speaking) and the Hebraic Jews (Hebrew speaking). The Greek speaking Jews would have been from outside of Jerusalem and Judea, and would have grown up speaking Greek as their primary language. They may very well have been considered second-class Jews by the Jews who grew up in Judea speaking Hebrew.

The church had a ministry which provided food to widows. The Greek speaking Jews were complaining their widows were being neglected. The apostles gathered together the whole community and said it would not be right for them to leave their ministry of teaching and preaching to oversee the distribution of food. So, like good Methodists, they decided to appoint a committee.

This committee would be made up of seven men, chosen by the people, and then prayed over and ordained by the apostles to oversee this work. We know from their names that all seven were Greek speaking Jews. These men were known by the Greek title diakonos, or servant, from which we get our word deacon. In the church today, deacons are still ordained to unique and specialized roles of service in the church and in the world, while the primary role of elders remains preaching and serving the sacraments.

In doing this, the church resolved its first real conflict and avoided possible schism. As a result, the number of disciples increases

rapidly, including some Jewish priests. But once again, persecution follows growth. Steven, one of the newly ordained deacons, is arrested on false charges and brought before the Sanhedrin. Next week, we will see that Steven preaches one of the best sermons in church history, tying together all of the Old Testament into the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

1. What does this passage teach us about resolving conflict in the church today?
2. Bishops, Elders, Pastors, and Deacons are called to special ministries, but all people are called to ministry in the church. What is the ministry of the laity? To what ministry is God calling you?

Week 31 Family Activity Ideas:

I Choose You: You will need a soft ball. Have your family stand or sit in a circle. Pass the ball to different family members, saying “I choose you to....(jump up and down, spin around, act like a monkey, jump on one foot, fly like a bird, etc.)”. When finished, ask how it felt to be chosen. The apostles chose 7 men to help minister to people, with the help of the Holy Spirit. It was a big job and they were special to be chosen. We have been chosen too and all have our own gifts to share with others!

Special Piece: Put together a puzzle as a family. Save back 1 piece, but don't let anyone know you have. When the puzzle is put together, but you're missing the 1 piece, talk about how frustrating it is to be missing that piece. The puzzle just isn't complete! Reveal the piece and say we all are like puzzle pieces in God's family. He's given us all special jobs and needs us all to do our part, just like we need all the pieces of the puzzle.



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