

Acts 29 – Week 2 – Go, Stand, Speak – Bible Study Helps

Sermon Summary: This sermon explores the early history of the Christian church as recorded in Acts chapters 5-7. It emphasizes the apostles' boldness in preaching Christ despite opposition, the importance of obedience to God over man, and the transition of God's focus from the Jews to the Gentiles. The sermon highlights the power of the Holy Spirit in the early church, the consequences of dishonesty before God, and the martyrdom of Stephen as a pivotal moment in church history.

Key Points:

- The apostles were empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach with boldness
- God still judges sin severely, as seen in the story of Ananias and Sapphira
- The early church faced opposition but continued to grow and multiply
- Stephen's sermon to the Jewish Council recounted Israel's history and their rejection of God's messengers
- The martyrdom of Stephen marked a turning point in God's dealings with Israel and the beginning of outreach to Gentiles
- Christians today should have the same boldness in witnessing as the early apostles

Scripture Reference:

- Acts 4:29-37, Acts 5-7

Stories:

- The account of Ananias and Sapphira lying about their donation to the church
- The apostles' miraculous escape from prison
- Stephen's historical sermon before the Sanhedrin, recounting Israel's history from Abraham to Solomon
- The martyrdom of Stephen and his vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God

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Discipleship and Small Group Guide: Acts 5-7 - The Early Church and Opposition

Opening Prayer

Key Takeaways:

1. The early church faced both internal challenges (Ananias and Sapphira) and external opposition.
2. God was at work through signs and wonders to the Jews to validate the apostles' message.
3. The apostles remained bold in preaching Christ despite threats and persecution.
4. Stephen's sermon recounted Israel's history to show how they had rejected God's messengers.
5. The rejection of Stephen marked a turning point as the gospel began to spread to Gentiles.

Discussion Questions:

1. What stands out to you most from the story of Ananias and Sapphira? How does this demonstrate God's holiness?
2. The apostles said, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). In what areas of life might we need to apply this principle today?
3. How did the early believers respond to persecution? What can we learn from their example?
4. Stephen recounted Israel's history before confronting the religious leaders. Why do you think he took this approach? How might understanding our own spiritual heritage impact our faith?
5. How does Stephen's martyrdom and his response to his persecutors challenge you personally?
6. The sermon mentioned that this period was transitional as God began to turn from Israel to the Gentiles. How does understanding this historical context help us interpret the book of Acts?

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Practical Applications:

1. Commit to reading and/or writing out the book of Acts over the next few weeks.
2. Pray for boldness to share your faith, even in the face of potential opposition.
3. Examine your life for areas of hypocrisy or "little sins" that you need to confess and turn from.
4. Look for an opportunity this week to share the gospel or invite someone to church.
5. Reflect on how God has been faithful in your own spiritual journey and share that testimony with the group.

Closing Prayer:

Thank God for the example of the early church and ask for His help in applying these lessons to our lives today.

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Discipleship Questions

How does the story of Ananias and Sapphira challenge our understanding of God's justice and holiness in the New Testament era?

In what ways might the early church's focus on prayer and the ministry of the word apply to modern church leadership and priorities?

How does Stephen's bold speech to the religious leaders inspire or challenge us in our own witness for Christ today?

What can we learn from the apostles' response to persecution and their joy in suffering for Christ's name?

How does the transition from ministry to Jews to inclusion of Gentiles reflect God's larger plan for salvation history?

In what ways does the supernatural power displayed in Acts (healings, prison escapes) inform our expectations of God's work today?

How might Stephen's recounting of Israel's history to the Jewish Council inform our approach to sharing the gospel with those familiar with religious traditions?

What does the unity and sacrificial giving of the early church challenge us to consider about our own church community and practices?

How does the martyrdom of Stephen and its impact on Saul (later Paul) demonstrate God's ability to use even tragic events for His purposes?

In light of the early church's boldness, how can we cultivate a similar spirit of courage and conviction in our witness for Christ?

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A 5-day Bible reading plan and devotional guide

Day 1: Boldness in Proclaiming the Gospel

Reading: Acts 4:29-31

Devotional: The early church faced intense opposition, yet they prayed not for safety, but for boldness to continue speaking God's word. Their prayer was answered dramatically - the place shook and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Today, reflect on areas in your life where you need holy boldness. Are there situations where fear holds you back from sharing your faith? Remember, the same Spirit that empowered the early believers lives in you. Pray for courage and opportunities to speak truth, trusting that God will give you the words and strength you need.

Day 2: Obedience to God Above All

Reading: Acts 5:27-32

Devotional: When faced with threats and commands to stop preaching about Jesus, Peter and the apostles declared, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Their conviction came from a deep understanding of who Jesus was and what He had done. Consider your own life - are there areas where societal pressures or fear of man cause you to compromise your obedience to God? Remember that true freedom and power come from aligning our will with God's. Ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen your resolve to follow Christ, even when it's difficult or unpopular.

Day 3: God's Presence in Suffering

Reading: Acts 7:54-60

Devotional: Stephen's martyrdom is a powerful testimony of God's presence in our darkest moments. As he faced death, Stephen was given a glimpse of heaven and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Even in his final breaths, he exemplified Christ-like love by asking God not to hold his killers' sin against them. Reflect on times of hardship in your own life. How has God made His presence known to you in difficult seasons? Pray for the faith to see beyond your current circumstances and for a heart of forgiveness towards those who have wronged you.

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Day 4: The Power of Personal Testimony

Reading: Acts 4:13-20

Devotional: The religious leaders were amazed by the boldness of Peter and John, noting that they were "unlearned and ignorant men." What made the difference was that these disciples had been with Jesus. Their personal experience with Christ gave them unshakeable confidence. Consider your own journey with Jesus. What has He done in your life that no one can deny? Your personal testimony is a powerful tool for the gospel. Take time today to write down specific ways God has worked in your life, and pray for opportunities to share your story with others.

Day 5: Unity in the Body of Christ

Reading: Acts 4:32-35

Devotional: The early church demonstrated remarkable unity, sharing everything they had so that no one was in need. This radical generosity was a powerful witness to the transforming power of the gospel. In our often individualistic culture, this level of community can seem foreign. Yet, it remains God's ideal for His church. Reflect on your own involvement in your local church community. Are there ways you can increase your commitment to fellow believers? Ask God to show you practical ways to foster unity and meet needs within your church family.