

Living by the Power of the Holy Spirit

Acts 1:8, Acts 2:29-39, Acts 4:28 & Acts 6:7-15

Pastor Kevin Laser, October 20, 2019

Good morning, it's good to see you. Welcome to church, and it's my pleasure to be able to have the opportunity to open the Word of God with you this morning. I trust you all had a good hearty breakfast, and I trust that in like manner, we're going to have a good hearty meal of God's Word this morning. So I invite you to open up to the Book of Acts chapter 1.

We're going to take a look at a variety of passages this morning of God doing His work and building His church in the Book of Acts. And just as God built the church in the Book of Acts using the power of the Holy Spirit through the Christians, He builds His church today using you and me.

Acts is a hinge book. It's a book that's sort of like a hinge. You can think of it where before the Book of Acts, there was no church. It wasn't that they weren't believers, but there was no church in how we know it. There was a Jewish religion and basically, they had the temple where the Jews would go to, and everything was revolving around the temple at that time. And now, in the Book of Acts, things change where the temple wasn't necessarily the focus point of worship where God wanted His believers to be. And so, before Jesus came, there was this religion that He had set up.

God had set up the Jewish religion and unfortunately, man had corrupted it with all sorts of traditions and customs. And they added other manmade rules to it and it became corrupt. And Jesus addressed them very firmly about that. It was a time when the Jewish religion falsely believed that their salvation was dependent on being a descendant of Abraham, a descendant of the Jewish race. And they thought that based on that, and based on their own good works, that they would be saved. That therefore, they would be justified.

And now, there's a new chapter happening in history, a chapter in the Book of Acts, where previously, God actually didn't fill the believer with the Holy Spirit. Whereas now, in the Book of Acts, the Holy Spirit would fill every single believer, every single believer. And that would be a radical change in the history of this world. Where once the Holy Spirit came to fill the prophets or a King perhaps on a special occasion and empower them for a specific service, now, every single believer, whether it was a four-year-old child or whether it was a 94-year-old person toward the end of their life, would have the Holy Spirit fully living within them.

Today, we're going to focus on three things. First of all, who is the Holy Spirit? Secondly, God, the Holy Spirit gives us power to speak boldly. And thirdly, God, the Holy Spirit gives us power to fix our eyes on Jesus. In other words, persevere and fix our eyes on Jesus when things are difficult.

In Acts 1:3, before Jesus is taken to heaven, Jesus gave instructions to the apostles by the Holy Spirit. Take a look at that just for a second here. It says, "To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God." Sorry, I was referring to verse 2: "Until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen."

We often think that because Jesus was God, that He operated in the power of His own “Godness”. And sometimes, He very much did. But what Jesus actually did, is He perfectly modeled for us what our life ought to be dependent upon. And that is living upon the power of the Holy Spirit. Because everything that Jesus did though He was God and fully God and never any less, He depended upon the Holy Spirit to lead Him and guide Him in everything that He did, everything that He said and every miracle that He even did.

Take a look at verse 4 here, because in this first chapter here, Jesus gives four things that He tells us about the Holy Spirit. In verse 4, it says this, here - it says, “Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, ‘Which,’ He said, ‘You heard of from Me.’” That promise was the Holy Spirit. This is the promise that was made in the Old Testament, and Jesus was telling them that, “Hey, this is a promise that's going to come about. The fulfillment of this promise is just around the corner.” In verse 5, it says here, “For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” So, He's introducing them to the Holy Spirit. “This is the promise. You're going to be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” And then look in verse 8, He says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

Here was a major shift in believing in God. It was a shift from the Jewish religion to Christianity. A new time in history arrived when God's focus would be on the salvation of the Gentiles. He focused and He came to seek and save the lost. He came first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. But now there's a new shift, and with this shift came the Holy Spirit in a way that had never been before on humanity. As it says in Romans 11:25, there's a partial hardening that has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. That's the season we're in right now. There's a partial hardening of the Israelites until the fullness of the Gentiles come in. And there'll be a day where Israel as a nation will collectively come to the Lord Jesus for their salvation. Unfortunately, Israel rejected their Messiah and they completely rejected Him to the point of crucifying Him on the cross. Take a look at the Acts 1:8 command here, again, just for a second here. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses.”

You see everything in the Old Testament and the prophets pointed to Jesus as the Messiah. When we think of Jesus, we think in the Old Testament that prophecies were given, and that everything in our salvation is dependent and central to the Lord Jesus Christ, and rightly so. The Messiah was the promised Saviour, the coming King of the Jews that God promised in the Old Testament. He was the one that was prophesied about. He was the one that would build his church. He is the head of the church, and the Holy Spirit would give the disciples the power (as it says here in verse 8), and all the future believers, which includes us to be witnesses of Christ.

That leads me to the question, what is this power for? The power is for us to be witnesses. We are to be giving testimony, to be teaching others, to be instructing others, to be helping others understand who God is, to be giving our story to others about God's work and what He's done in our life.

We often read though the prophecies in the Old Testament of Jesus coming, and these are great prophecies. He was born of the virgin Mary in little Bethlehem. Jesus would be forsaken. He was pierced for our transgressions. He would be a suffering servant. He would

bear our sins and suffer in our place. The Messiah, He would not remain dead, and He would not see decay, and He would be exalted. These are just some of the many prophecies that the Old Testament gives us about Jesus. And often when we think of our Christianity, we think of Jesus. We think of He's the one that was prophesied in the Old Testament, and He's the one that came and everything hinges on Him, and rightly so. I don't want to dismiss that one bit. But the early church (and I just want to say this one other thing) recognized and they focused on Jesus as the Messiah. The Jews rejected the messiahship of Jesus. They may have thought and given Him some credit to be a good man, to be a wise man, but He threatened their salvation, which depended on their ancestry and their works.

Many of the sermons in the early church such as what Peter and Stephen gave, they confronted the Jews, the religious leaders about the rejection and the crucifixion of Jesus. The church was tenacious about exalting Jesus and many suffered and were martyred actually for their devotion and their faith in Christ. The church knew that Jesus was central and essential and central to our salvation, and without Him, there's absolutely no forgiveness of sins. Peter hit the bullseye when he said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." When many abandoned Jesus, that's what Peter said. In Acts 2:23 Peter says this:

23 This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and the foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and you put Him to death. 24 But God raised Him up again, and putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held by the power of death.

You see, it was pretty determined by God that the eternally begotten Son of God would take on flesh and satisfy the justice and anger that God has against us for our sins. Through Jewish history, there was a great anticipation of the Messiah's coming. Unfortunately, they didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah, that He was the way, the truth, and the life. When we think of salvation, we often think it's all about Jesus. He's the one that makes our salvation possible. Everything hinges on Him because He is the one that atoned for our sins. Being righteous? Yes, He lived the perfect life, obeying every single command that God had and death could not keep hold of Him. And rightly so, Jesus is the center of our salvation. He is the one that atoned for our sins.

In contrast, however, we don't often think though, do we? About the foundational aspect of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life. The Holy Spirit sometimes is considered to be a side role or perhaps even an afterthought of God, to help us to just live the Christian life. Sadly, some have even dismissed the Holy Spirit's deity and relegated Him to merely being an act of power of God. This morning, we're going to look to see that when Christ began building His church in the Book of Acts that it was God the Holy Spirit who is the source of power for the church. The same source of power for this church, here. The Holy Spirit would transform people's lives, He would give the life of Christ. He would give the life of Christ to people and open their eyes to see their need for a Saviour. And the same Holy Spirit that came in the Book of Acts and did those amazing signs and wonders and gave gifts and brought thousands to salvation, is the Holy Spirit that lives within you if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Since the day of Pentecost, all believers have been baptized with the Holy Spirit.

What is this baptism that Jesus talked about? What does it mean to be baptized by the Spirit? Simply put, upon receiving salvation, the Holy Spirit comes to live within you, within every single believer. When we are saved, we are placed in Christ and we receive the fullness of God, the Holy Spirit living within us. He takes up residence within you. The Jews thought

that God lived in the temple. That's where God lived. That was what they were fighting about with Stephen, and that's what they accused him of ridiculing and mocking. We are now though, at the temple of God and He lives in us by the Holy Spirit.

You see, the prerequisite though for having the Holy Spirit, is believing and repenting. Believing and repenting are friends, they're not enemies - and they're always together. And when we believe, we repent. And when that happens, we come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit immediately comes to take up residence in that believer.

But who is the Holy Spirit? That's sort of a big question, sort of like asking who's God. Well, the Holy Spirit is mentioned 79 times in the Old Testament. In 21 of the 39 books of the Old Testament, all the way from the time of creation in the book of Genesis (did you ever notice where it says, "God says, 'Let Us make man in our image'") to the last book of the Old Testament, in Malachi. In the New Testament, the Greek word *pneuma* is the word for "Holy Spirit" or "Spirit" specifically referring to the Holy Spirit, and specifically referred to the Holy Spirit 245 times. So a total in the Bible, the Holy Spirit is referred to about 320 times. And we receive the Holy Spirit the same way as salvation. How do we receive salvation? It's a gift, and the Holy Spirit comes to us as a gift in the same manner. Because when we are saved, He comes as the deposit for our inheritance of our salvation.

In Peter's sermon in Acts 2:38, "Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" This is a gift (I just want to clearly point out), for all believers. The Holy Spirit is the deposit guaranteeing our salvation. Sort of like a first fruit of the benefits of salvation. The Holy Spirit is what God the Father gives to all believers as the sign that they're redeemed, that they are adopted into His family and that they are now new creatures in Christ Jesus. Just as we can't earn our salvation by our works, not even baptism, we cannot do any work to earn the Holy Spirit.

When the Holy Spirit enters a person, they have ALL of the Holy Spirit. Not part of the Holy Spirit and maybe increasing in measure as they mature or get older, but they have all of the Holy Spirit upon faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We don't get more of the Holy Spirit the more mature we get. But the Holy Spirit does use us increasingly the more mature we get and the more we trust in Him and depend upon Him and obey Him and follow Him.

In the New Testament, we see that the Holy Spirit plays many key roles in the Christian's life. Let's take a quick panoramic view of the role of the Holy Spirit before we jump into the power of the Holy Spirit to give us boldness. First of all, He empowers the believer. He is the guarantee and seal of our salvation, as we've already talked about. He is the seal of God on the believer, indicating that we are redeemed, that we are justified, and that we are eternally in His kingdom and part of His family. He enables us to guard the treasure of the good news of salvation. Scripture says that part of the role of the Holy Spirit is that we guard the treasure of the Gospel. I don't have to tell you, but the Gospel is under attack, and we guard it by which power? The power of the Holy Spirit, the power of the one who created the universe. He intercedes for us, He knows our needs intimately. And right now in heaven, He's interceding for you and for me. He produces fruit in us; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Those come from the Holy Spirit living within us. It's not something that we can manufacture. If this is the fruit of the Spirit, it's of God, not of us.

He is the one who regenerates the unbeliever. When you became a Christian, it was the Holy Spirit who entered your life, came into your life, and He regenerated you. You and I were dead in our transgressions, in our sins, and it was God who came and regenerated us. He made you a new creature in Christ Jesus.

He convicts us though, of sin, does He not? He wants us to see clearly what's wrong, and He wants us not just to see it, but to agree with it. Such that we actually hate our sin. He convicts us of righteousness. How does He do that? He convicts us of righteousness knowing that He alone is righteous, and we've got no righteousness. In fact, we are sinners and therefore, we need His righteousness imputed to us (a fancy word for being credited to us). Jesus convicts us also of judgment. You see, no creature in all of heaven and all of earth is hidden from God's sight, but all things are open and laid bare to His eyes, to whom we must give an account.

He sanctifies us, He changes us to be more like the Lord Jesus. He conforms us. Stop and think about Jesus, who He is, His greatness, His righteousness, His holiness, His purity, His love, His compassion, everything about Him. The Holy Spirit is conforming you and me into the image of Jesus. He is the source of all spiritual gifts as we've talked about already. He gives all of us a gift that we can use to serve Him in the church. He teaches us truth through the Bible. You know when you open up the Bible and you pray and you say, "God, help me to understand what the Word says," who's helping you? It's God, the Holy Spirit within you. He opens your eyes, He creates a hunger and a thirst for the Word, and He gives to you an understanding. And then He doesn't just leave you there to understand it and walk off and fumble in your ways, but then He gives us power to obey what He says.

And He is the one that spoke through the prophets, the apostles, and the writers of Scripture to write down God's Word. Second Peter 1:21 says this, "For no prophecy has ever been made by an act of human will, but men move from the Holy Spirit, spoke from God."

You see God, the Holy Spirit is active in our lives from the moment that He regenerates us and He puts us in Christ, to the moment that we draw our last breath. You see, Jesus commissioned the disciples to make disciples of all nations.

We are those disciples, we are following God now. He says, "I want you to make disciples of all nations." And then Jesus ascended to heaven, He left them. You see, when Jesus said, "I want you to make disciples of all nations," they probably thought, "This is great. We can go ask Him questions anytime, we can talk to Him, we can tell Him our problems. He's right there. We can like move next door to Him if He gets His own place," and all this kind of stuff. And then He leaves. "Okay... What do we do? Who do we talk to? He was the go-to guy before. Now, who did we go to?" Well, God, He knew all this, He planned this. He sent the Holy Spirit so that we've got the Holy Spirit in every single one of us. So that when we're by ourselves doing the ministry, we have God living within us and we can call on God and pray to God. We don't have to go down the street or take an airplane to go find Jesus and ask Him the questions or pick up our phone and text Him. We can just talk to Him, He knows. God's great. Jesus says this in John 14:16, "16 I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be with you."

In terms of the role of God and the role of Jesus and the role of the Holy Spirit, you can think of it a little bit like this: God the Father predestined you and chose you to be redeemed. God the Son atoned for your sins on the cross. And God the Holy Spirit lives within you, giving you power to live the Christian life. But I want to be clear: this is one God; one God, three persons - a great mystery. Maybe Jeremy will preach on that another time.

The power of the Holy Spirit is to speak boldness. To speak boldness is first seen on the day of Pentecost. Take a look at Acts chapter 2 with me, if you wouldn't mind. Because in Acts 2:4, it says this: "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance."

Have you ever wondered what they were saying when they were speaking with this gift of tongues? The Bible actually tells us. Take a look at verse 10. It's talking about different people groups and I'm going to jump in the middle of it here. "10 Phrygia and Pamphylia (the people from these places), Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and the visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans, Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." Friends, when the disciples and the believers were speaking with the gift of tongues, they were speaking the Gospel. They were speaking the truth of who Jesus is as the Messiah.

The hot issue of the day was who is Jesus? Was He this promised Messiah that we need to submit to and follow or is He not? And when they were preaching and teaching to all the Jews that came to this great celebration this day of Pentecost...(not the day of Pentecost, but there's three great celebrations that the Jews come to in Jerusalem each year)...they were talking about Jesus, and they were talking about Him not only from what they saw when they experienced Him, but from the Old Testament. And we know that they were talking about Him from the Old Testament as well because in the sermons that were given by Peter and Stephen, they were referencing the Old Testament. They had like portions of it memorized. They knew it really well.

But you notice that the believers there, they were not concerned about what they would be accused of. They were accused of drunkenness. They said, "Who are these speaking this language? What's this all about? Nine o'clock in the morning, you guys are drunk obviously, you're babbling." They weren't concerned about the accusation. They were concerned about what it appeared like. Sometimes we get that way with presenting the Gospel, right? "Oh, how's it going to come across? Are they going to like me? Are they still going to be my friend? So and so?" Our heart kind of wanders in that direction. These believers here were not concerned about that one bit. They were concerned about the salvation of their friends, of the fellow Jews that were at this day of Pentecost celebration.

The day of Pentecost was a celebration called the "Feast of Weeks" or "Harvest." And basically, like I said, three times a year, the Jews would come to Jerusalem for a great celebration. This was one of them. And Pentecost means "50th." And basically, it's celebrated 50 days after the Passover, which is typically at the end of May or early June. And at Pentecost, there was an offering of first fruits that was given to God.

You see, they were being witnesses to the nations that were visiting Jerusalem for this feast. They were bold in proclaiming about the great deeds that God had done. You see, their heart was over flowing with joy at all Jesus had done. A natural outflow of their salvation was to

tell others about the Lord Jesus. And God made them powerful witnesses for the gift of tongues that God has given to us.

And I just want to point out that we don't have to have a special gift or even the gift of evangelism to be an effective witness to proclaim God's salvation to the lost. We don't need that. We just need to take God's Word, take the testimony of what God has given to us and share that with unbelievers, and leave the results to God because God will give the effectiveness of His Word to what we're sharing with others. It was the Holy Spirit speaking through the Christians and the gift of tongues, it was a sign to the people that it was God who was establishing and building His church through the apostles. God was grabbing their attention by the sign and giving them this Gospel through the gift. However, in unbelief, they accused the disciples of drunkenness. And so Peter, here, responds with a sermon.

In Acts 2:17, Peter moved by the Holy Spirit, preaches to them in boldness and clarity. And Peter quotes from Joel. He says this, "And it shall be in the last days," God says, "That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind." This gift of tongues, when the Holy Spirit came on the people, this was the fulfillment of that prophesy that Joel had given. It was God's work, pouring the Holy Spirit on those who believe, and the Jews found this statement really hard to accept. They weren't going to swallow it. Their idea of salvation was limited to the Jews. But Peter pointed out that Jesus is the promised Messiah that David prophesied about. Peter understood that the Jews would say that they followed David and his prophetic words.

Read with me in Acts chapter 2. we're going to read a section here. Acts chapter 2 beginning at verse 29. "Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and he was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day." I think he's sort of subtly pointing out that Jesus' tomb is empty, but David's tomb is still full.

30 And so, because he was a prophet and knew that "God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on His throne," 31 he looked ahead and he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that "He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay." 32 This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. 33 Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. 34 For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, 35 until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.'" 36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.

37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." 40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and he kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. 42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

You see, David's body was still in the grave, and Peter was pointing out the one who conquered death isn't in the grave - and that is the Messiah, Jesus Christ. David can't save you, being of the lineage of anybody who is a Jew, you can't get saved that way. You can only get saved by the one who conquered the grave. David prophesied, in fact, that one would be raised from the dead and He is Jesus and He conquered sin and death. He is the one that can save you. That's what Peter is doing here. He's drawing his attention to the fact that, "You say you follow Abraham, you say you follow Isaac and Jacob and David, and you look up to them and you read their Scriptures." Peter says, "Open your eyes. David said, 'That one is coming and this is Him. This is the Messiah. There is no other.'" Peter was bold.

I want you to look at verse 36 for a second here because he says, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ..." When he says, "Lord," he's referring to the fact that, "This is the one who now is in charge of our life. This is the one who we need to submit to. This is the one who we need to follow. This is the one, in fact, that you've been rejecting. You've put on the cross. This is Lord and He is Christ. He's the one that was prophesied about. This is clearly outlined in Scripture. There is no question about this. As much as they might want to reject and haggle about it and argue about it, this is not a negotiating factor."

So Peter here, he was bold and preaching and as a result, 3,000 people got saved. The Holy Spirit spoke powerfully through Peter, and he spoke with the Word of God. How did Peter know what to say? Well, he obviously studied God's Word. And as he studied God's Word, there was a clarity and there was a boldness that comes from knowing God's Word.

Soon afterwards, Peter and John are on the way to the temple and they meet up with a lame man who's about 40 years old, and he can't walk. And Peter says, "I don't possess silver and gold, but what I do have, I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." I would have loved to have seen that. And as a result, the man was telling others about Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders get upset about this. Peter and John are arrested and they're released, but they are forbidden to speak of Jesus. They're released and they joined the rest of the disciples. Let's take a look at what happens when they are released.

We're going to go to chapter 4:23 here. "23 When they had been released, they went to their own companions and they reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said ..." Now I want to note, I want you to note here what it is they pray, okay? They'd been forbidden to speak of Jesus and now they're together and they're about to pray. What comes out of their mouth? What's their focus? What are they asking God for? Or may I even suggest? What are they not asking God for? "O Lord, it is You who 'made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them.'" What's happening there? If I was them, I would have been, "God, give me strength, give me courage, I need help. This is scary. I could get arrested. Bad things can happen to me or all of us." But the first thing they say is, "Lord, it is you 'who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.'" The first thing that they do is they praise God, they worship Him. They come back to the beginning. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." – Genesis 1:1. They found great comfort in the Old Testament.

We sometimes think that we need the New Testament and that's our Bible in a sense. That's where we draw everything from, and it's essential to our Christian life. But I have to remind myself that the Christians here were drawing from the Old Testament. It was all the Old

Testament. And the New Testament was about to be written in terms of this book that we have here.

When we have troubles in life and we struggle in life and we need courage, we should go to God and just worship Him. Yes, we can call to Him for help and call to Him for boldness. But you know what? When we stop to think about who God is and the fact that He is God, the Holy Spirit that lives within us, there's a boldness that will naturally come about. Because we know who God is, that He's the one that simply spoke everything into existence, and that it's that same God who lives within you and lives within me.

Peter and John's preaching resulted in another 2,000 souls, so we have about 5,000 people here that were being saved, and they devoted themselves to spending time with God. What did they ask for? Boldness and confidence. They asked that they might speak God's Word with all confidence. They wanted to keep proclaiming God's Word. And their confidence and their boldness came as they remembered God's greatness and they walked in obedience.

Sometimes we forget that. We ask God, "God, I want to be bold, I want to be courageous, I want to be all for You." And then we forget the next simple but very difficult step sometimes of actually obeying Him. How do we ever expect to be bold if we don't step out in obedience? We don't step out in faith. Thankfully, the Lord forgives us for the many times that we have not stepped out of faith though.

Later, Stephen came on the scene in chapter 6, and he's appointed to serve food to the non-Jewish, Hellenistic Jews. Let's read in Acts 6:7. Acts 6:7 says,

7 The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem (I want you to hear this phrase here), and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith. 8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. 9 But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, they rose up and they argued with Stephen. 10 But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. 11 And then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and they dragged him away and brought him before the Council. 13 They put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against the holy place and the Law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us." 15 And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face was like the face of an angel.

Three things actually, I want to draw from this passage quickly, and point out. First of all, do you remember when Jesus was crucified? Many of the priests and the Sanhedrin, the Council, the religious leaders, they were the ones that were behind getting Jesus crucified. There's many others that jumped on board, but many of these - I want you to look at the word "many" there for a second, in verse 7. "And a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith." God was doing a work amidst the Jews, thankfully, so. Look at verse 10: "But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking." If you read through the sermon...(And I encourage you to do this later. We don't have time to do this today. But maybe later this evening, read through the sermon)...what Stephen gives in his

defense when they accuse him. And very simply put, he brings the Old Testament. He does a beautiful narrative of much of the Old Testament as a basis for Christian faith in Jesus Christ, is what he does. “But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit....” why? Because all he did is he gave them God's Word. He didn't invent something new. He didn't have a new-fangled approach to presenting the Gospel. He took them to the Old Testament. What if we had to go to the Old Testament to present the Gospel? Okay, for maybe this next week, we're just going to depend upon the Old Testament only to bring the Gospel to our neighbour, to our friend, to our colleague. Let's not be afraid to go to the Old Testament. And when we go to the Old Testament, let's take great joy in finding those nuggets where the Gospel comes out.

Stephen was falsely accused of speaking against the holy place and the Law. He's a man of integrity, a man of good reputation. He was above rebuke and they knew it, they knew it. Which is why they had to get people to falsely accuse him. They accused him of speaking against the temple and against the Law. And Stephen, guided by the Holy Spirit, gives a beautiful detailed defense of the Christian faith from that Old Testament. He doesn't necessarily directly address their false accusations right away, but he gives his answer toward the end of the message, which is that he respects the temple and the Law just like David did, which is what their accusation was.

What Stephen does actually though, is he actually accuses them of blasphemy, of limiting God to the temple. Their thinking was, “God is in the temple. We need to go to the temple. That's where we worship. That's where we focus.” And he's like, “No, that's not where we have to worship God, because now, we are the Holy Spirit's temple. We are the temple that God resides within.”

Look at Acts 7:48,

48 However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says: 49 “Heaven is My throne, and earth is the footstool of My feet; what kind of house will you build for Me?” says the Lord, “Or what place is there for My repose? 50 Was it not My hand which made all these things?”

And then Stephen is very bold in this next statement. He says this,

51 You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. 52 Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; 53 you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you did not keep it.

Stephen spoke with boldness because he knew God's Word, and the Holy Spirit gave him conviction of these truths. He knew the truth well enough that he could spot a fraud, and he could call it out. It's sort of like a \$20 bill.

There was a guy in Toronto recently, who decided to sell his iPhone for 63 of these \$20 bills. Not these exact kind. Because the tragedy of it is that he got scammed. He decided to sell his iPhone for \$1,260, and probably on Craigslist or someplace. And he decided to meet this fellow and it was sort of a dark place (wherever this was), perhaps it was evening. But gave

him the cell phone after some discussion, took the money, took the money in hand (it was cash), Got home and he began to look at his cash. “It doesn’t feel right. It doesn’t have the bumps, doesn’t have the ridges, it doesn’t have all those earmarks of an authentic official \$20 bill.” He got scammed, probably because he didn’t know how to quickly identify what’s real money and what’s not. And when Stephen here was preaching, he knew the truth. He knew the truth well enough that when he was accused of something false, he could quickly identify that it was false. And he knew the truth because he had spent time in God’s Word. He’d spent the time studying it and meditating upon it. He spent time trying to understand it and of course, trying to obey it.

The Holy Spirit also gives us the power to persevere in love and faithfulness. Stephen was the first Christian, actually, who was killed for his faith. This was a catalyst actually for the spread of the good news that salvation is in Jesus and Jesus alone. He left a testimony of how the Holy Spirit gives us power to persevere. Power comes from keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, and when our focus is on obeying Him and being faithful, the Holy Spirit actually strengthens us. And in the case of Stephen, the Holy Spirit strengthened him to die well, to finish well. He died looking forward to being with his Saviour.

Let's read in Acts 7:54 (we got a few more verses to read). “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick....” (The Jewish leaders, they had heard the testimony, the sermon that Stephen gave)

...they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him. 55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; 56 and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and I see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” 57 But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and they rushed at him with one impulse. 58 When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And they went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and he said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” 60 And then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” And having said this, he fell asleep.

When his life was threatened, it was coming to an end, he kept his eyes focused on Jesus. He gazed intently, purposefully determined. He was focused on the glory of God even at the very end when he was being wronged. But you notice what Jesus was doing. Jesus was standing.

Elsewhere in Scripture, it talks about Jesus sitting. But here, He’s standing. Why is Jesus standing? What’s this all about? What’s the significance of Him standing up when Stephen sees him in heaven and God gives him this vision of what’s happening in heaven moments before his body dies? Well, it’s for this reason: He has stood, Jesus has stood to receive Stephen’s testimony and to be His advocate. He has stood that He might come forward to be the judge of those who will trample upon God’s prophet. Jesus is rising from His throne to come to Stephen’s defense and to judge his persecutors. It’s a plain fact in Scripture, whether we like it or not, everyone is appointed to die and after that, comes judgment, my friends. He stood to vindicate Stephen, and He will come again to judge this world. Just as a parent who might see a child, their child receive some injustice on the playground and it’s blatant and it’s obvious, a parent stands up, don’t they? They don’t just sit back, they stand up. They come to their defense. They come to solve the problem. They come to make right what has been wronged.

We've all been wrong though, haven't we? We've all been mistreated. Someone says something that isn't true. Maybe they lie about you. Someone brings up your past and they gossip, casting you in a negative light, even though the situation has been confessed and dealt with. Someone cheats you out of money that you thought you could trust him with. You wanted to show love in a practical way, but instead, they took advantage of you. Someone breaks a promise that they made to you. Your trust now is broken.

Maybe it was a small promise, maybe it was a lifelong promise. What they said to you that they'd do, they never did, and they don't plan to. Maybe somebody hits you and was absolutely violent with you, and they really offended you in that way. Or maybe someone abused you in private ways and it haunts you. Where's our hope? Where's our strength? Who do we look to? What's the power that we have as a Christian to go through life when things go wrong? Things went wrong for Stephen, but I may add, God was there and God had planned that at that point that was the last day of his life.

And I don't know what trials you've gone through, I don't know what trials you're facing today, but I encourage you that if you are a believer, you have the Holy Spirit living within you giving you power to overcome anything and everything that you are facing. It's God living within you. Look at what Stephen says, his last words: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" When he was being murdered, what was he thinking about? "Lord, get them back. Lord, judge them. Lord, come quick, I know you can do it." No, "Lord," he says, "Do not hold this sin against them." The last thing he gave was the Gospel. "You, the persecutor, you that is doing wrong, look to Jesus because He can forgive you of what you're doing wrong to me now."

Romans 8 says this in verse 26,

26 In the same way the Spirit also helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; 27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for the good of those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us, will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Jesus Christ is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, distress, persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long, (We have to die to ourselves every single day); we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Perseverance my friends comes through the Holy Spirit within you. And may we be a people who persevere in our word and our action. May our perspective always be one on focusing on the glory of God. Yes, we have to die to ourselves and that's the daily painful process, isn't it? But God gives us power to do that which we have no power to do. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, we thank you for the great, great gift of the Holy Spirit that You've given to us to live the Christian life. Lord, I pray that we would be a people who would always be depending upon the Holy Spirit. So often we wander off thinking we can do things all on our own, and we fumble and we stumble because we try to do things on our own. But I pray, Father, that we would take time Lord, to know Your Word, to study it, to meditate upon it, to treasure it, to speak it, and to do that with boldness, love and courage.

I pray, Father, that when we go through trials and struggles in life, Lord, when things go wrong against us and people treat us not right, that we would still keep our eyes fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray, Father, that we would be a church that would make a difference in this community, and that the Gospel would go to all the corners, that we would not be shy or hesitant but that we would grab those opportunities of those people that You put in our lives, Lord, and that we would be bold ambassadors of Christ Jesus.

Thank you, Father, for the gift of the Holy Spirit that resides in each one of us, the fullness of the Holy Spirit that we have nothing lacking. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.