

15a ACTS

Let's begin our study this evening by taking a moment at the outset to clear our minds and prepare our hearts and seek the ministry of God's Holy Spirit. The comforting thing is, I think for all of us, that we are not called upon to operate in our own strength because if we were, God's plan would never get off the ground. Fortunately, He makes the plan and then He also provides all of the strength and the resources and the guidance to make it happen.

And we have to make the decision to get on the bus. We do not have to get out behind and push the bus down the road. But to ensure that we are susceptible to the graces that God has put at our disposal, let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, thank you for giving us another day in your plan. We thank you for the path that you have mapped for us, the course that you have charted that takes us exactly where we need to be at each step of the way. We thank you for your sustaining grace, your comfort and encouragement, your compassion on us even when we fall far short of your glory.

You never leave us or forsake us. Your mercies are renewed every morning. Your faithfulness is great and the expectation of the future is bright and full of potential.

And that is all because of our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for Him and for His faithfulness, His love for us, His intercession ministry that He exercises at your right hand on our behalf. We pray that we will walk in a worthy manner as a result of our study tonight so that our lives will reflect your glory.

Give us insight and understanding of the passages we look at. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, we pick up tonight in Luke chapter 4, right at the end of the chapter. We are just on the verge of going into chapter 5. We have just one or two loose ends to tie up here in chapter 4. The apostles, what did I say? Well, you can go to Luke chapter 4 and work your way forward. It is Acts.

I shouldn't think and talk at the same time, I guess. Yes, it is Acts chapter 4 where we are finishing up. The apostles, in particular Peter and John, have been in view there in the temple area.

They, as a result of the healing of the crippled man by God, were arrested, locked up overnight, had the chance to stand before potentates and speak the truth. They were not abashed. They were not ashamed.

They were not afraid. It was a pressure situation. Every different type of leadership, every kind of potential for ruin and disaster is there, whether political, governmental,

military, religious, civil.

All of the different powers that be, from the wealthy to the influential, are all arranged before them. It is an ironic thing that Peter was frightened into denying the Lord by the lowest member of the staff in the high priest's courtyard, the servant girl who was throwing another stick on the fire out there, asked him a question, and he would not own up to his identity as a disciple. And yet now, what a transformation.

The powers of the earth are ranged against him. They have the power to imprison him indefinitely, even to take his life, and he is bold and uncompromising in testifying to the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is, in fact, his commission.

That is what the Lord Jesus chose him and called him to do. May God grant that we are as bold and as courageous in the fulfilling of our calling in various areas of our life. They were commanded in verse 18 not to speak at all or teach in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Peter and John answered and said, whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. The reason he is saying you judge is they have already made up their mind that it is more important to listen to God rather than to these, quote, authorities. This is not a decision to make lightly, by the way.

We don't casually decide to go against those that have the rule over us, but when there is a conflict, and when we are called upon by an authority to violate our Christian conscience or to go directly against the express word of God, then we have to respectfully disagree. You will notice John and Peter are respectful. They don't mouth off.

They don't get sarcastic. They simply say, you'll have to judge for yourself before God whether what we are doing is right or not. We have to make a choice between listening to God or listening to you.

We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. Now, you will notice there in verse 20, we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. This is one of the requirements for being an apostle, is someone who was an eyewitness and who was a first-person attendee in the Bible classes that the Lord Jesus held.

We have lost, I think, in the traditional understanding of the church, the distinction between apostles and the rest of Christianity. The church in general and creeds and confessions of faith and church constitutions and so on tend to claim Matthew 28, 19 or Acts 1, 8 as the mission of all believers. We are all to go forth and evangelize.

Evangelism is a wonderful thing. All of us were evangelized by someone. But it is not the mission of the church.

We've covered this many times. I'm not going to dwell on it. But you will notice that how do you know if it is your mission? One of the things is are you an apostle? It is really easy

to figure out.

If you are driving in rural Oklahoma and you pass a little one-horse church and it's got a sign out front that says the Apostle Jobob Willis is the leader of that church, you know he is not an apostle unless he is really, really old. Jobob is short for Yohanan or something. He is the Apostle John in disguise waiting for the second coming.

Because you have to be an eyewitness of the Lord Jesus Christ in his earthly ministry. You have to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ. And this is what they are testifying to.

We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. Turn with me quickly to 2 Peter 1, 16. 2 Peter 1, 16.

Peter says, We did not follow cleverly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's not just a good story. It's not just a ripping good yarn.

We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. Peter was on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter was there when the great catch of fish came in.

Peter walked on the water with the Lord. Peter saw the resurrected Christ. Peter had a conversation with him on the shore when he said, Peter, do you love me? Three times.

Peter is an eyewitness. Turn a few pages over to 1 John 1, 1. This is the Apostle John. The other attendee, James, by the time these epistles are written, has died.

The brother of John, James, was one of the first casualties of the church age. He was murdered by Herod, the first of the disciples slash apostles to die. I still don't understand why, or maybe I do.

Maybe it's because the king was named James. But you know that his name was Jacob, right? It was Jacob and John. Jacob is the name in Greek.

They just changed it to James, I guess, to make the king happy because his name was James. I'm not sure why else. But he's gone.

So John and Peter are the remaining witnesses of those things. Look at 1 John 1, 1. If someone is going to tell us New Testament truth about Christ and Christianity and the church, it must come from someone who has had first-person eyewitness contact with the Lord Jesus Christ or who is recording the teaching of one who did so. You have Mark, whose gospel records the recollections of Peter.

You have Luke, whose volume 1 and volume 2 that we're studying comes from contact with all of the apostles, Peter and John and the apostle Paul and others. These are the ones who bear witness and declare, as John says here, I declare to you that eternal life,

that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us, that which we have seen and heard, we declare to you so that you also may have fellowship with us. Truly, our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

These things we write to you that your joy may be full. We don't tend to think about that too much. It's not the first idea that comes to us when we think about, well, it's time for Bible class or I want to stop and have a time of meditation or have my devotions or do my Bible reading or listen to a program of Bible teaching in some form.

It's not the first thing we think of that, well, this is going to be my inoculation of joy for the day or for the week or whatever. We don't always make the link. And yet John says the whole reason that he's writing down what he knows about the Lord, what he saw and heard, is so that our joy will be complete, that it will be filled up.

This is the road, this is the avenue to fulfillment, to contentment, to happiness, to peace in our souls. This is why the New Testament Scriptures were written. All Scripture is inspired by God.

All Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. And it has a purpose. So that the man or woman of God will become mature and be thoroughly furnished unto all good works with a view toward every good work.

If you're going to do a good work, it has to come from knowledge of God's will through His Word. The Word of God equips us. The Word of God fulfills us.

We are people without a purpose. They have all kinds of people that they're talking to now. They had the big me generation and the women's liberation movement and feminism and all of that.

And all these ladies strode boldly forth into the workforce and into the areas that had been seemingly unavailable to them beforehand. In the man's world, in government, in leadership. We've got women governors.

We've got women in all different levels of every different part of society. Which is fine. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with that.

It's not the church. Paul didn't say, I will not suffer a woman to exert authority in government. He said, I will not suffer a woman to exert authority in the church.

There's a picture involved in the church. There's no biblical principle I know of that says a woman can't rise to whatever high office or take whatever job, be the president of something. If you're qualified and can do the job and people will let you, why knock yourself out? But for the last decade or so now, these women who took advantage of all of this and pushed ahead into the areas in lieu of family life, in lieu of having children, in

lieu of the domestic opportunities that were a traditional part of being a woman, especially in America.

Now some of them are looking back over their shoulder and saying, wait a minute, I'm the chairman of the board here, but now what? What am I going to do when I retire? I've got no kids. I've got no grandkids. Maybe I don't have a husband.

I've got all of this professional achievement, but I don't feel fulfilled. Well, that's sort of almost a truism anymore. You have just as many people who knock themselves out having families and being domestic and winning the pie baking contest and doing all of the domestic things.

And they wind up, their kids leave home and they have the empty nest syndrome and they say, well, what now? Do I just wait for somebody to call up and let me babysit the grandkids? And people feel unfulfilled. You can be Donald Trump and feel unfulfilled. You can be Brad Pitt and feel unfulfilled.

You can be anybody on this planet and be unfulfilled because there is only one genuine source of fulfillment and it comes from the manufacturer. It comes from the God who created us. And when we find ourselves in a continual state of dissatisfaction, I'm not talking about your bad day or your chagrin or frustration over some particular situation, but if as a climate of life and as sort of a standard way of perceiving who you are and where you are, you say, this just isn't making it.

This isn't cutting it. There is a very good chance that it has a spiritual root. It has a spiritual cause because when our spiritual life is healthy, when our spiritual life is flourishing, we are like the Apostle Paul.

Whatever state I find myself, I can be content. I may not be firing off party poppers. I may not be popping champagne corks.

I may not be blowing up balloons and setting off fireworks, but I am content. I'm satisfied that there is meaning and purpose and definition to my life. I'm, like it says, the higher ground hymn.

I'm treading on the upward way. New heights I'm gaining every day. I may have a slip and a stumble and a roll back down a little ways, but generally speaking, I'm on an upward trend.

I can see progress. I can see some Christ-likeness developing in my soul. It may be slow and painful, but there is progress.

There is healing. There is plowing of the hard ground. That is what God promises us when John says here, I write these things to you so that your joy may be full.

It is the word of God that educates us, that grows us, and enlarges our capacity. You can take two different people. I think this would be a great reality show.

This is my idea. Somebody write it down, mail it off. I want to see if they'll do it.

Put it on TV. This is my reality show, Twin Mansions. I want to take two people, give them each a million dollars, give them a three million dollar mansion to live in, and a fleet of cars, Lamborghinis, Stuts, Bearcats, whatever they want.

Fleet of motorcycles, fleet of just whatever they want. Give them a big pile of stuff. But I want one of those people to just be one of these faceless people that's out there anyway.

Get them off of Survivor or Big Brother or something. Then I want the other one to be a mature, growing Christian. Then I want to see, over the course of time, who has the capacity to really appreciate and enjoy those things.

Because I already know the answer. The great thing about being a believer with the word of God is that it gives us a cup to be filled. When David says in Psalm 23, my cup runs over, God prepares a table before me.

Isn't that an odd thing? Have you ever thought about that as many times as you've heard Psalm 23? Why does he say that God prepares a table for him in the presence of his enemies? This is an odd thing. Here comes the, you know how it is in all of the scenes that you see. You look up to the horizon, people hear a rumbling or they see a cloud of dust, and all of a sudden the entire line of the enemy comes up over the ridge, and you think, ooh, this is not good.

Well, David says, instead of going and getting the five smooth stones and warming up the sling, I sit down and God lays out a table, puts a meal out in front of me. I'm dining, I'm feasting on the manna while the enemy is coming over the ridge. He says, you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

What does that mean? I'm sitting down, dining, taking in nourishment, getting sustained and strengthened, and somebody else must be handling the enemy, otherwise it's going to be like one of those credit card commercials. You know, what have you got in your wallet? The guy's trying to sit there, and here comes all of the Visigoths down there trying to take his head off, and then he says, well, I've got whatever card that is. You can tell it's not an effective commercial.

I don't know what card it's for. What have you got in your wallet? But the idea is, what do we have in our soul? If we have capacity, then God sets a table for us. Even in the presence of our enemies, we can sit down.

You know, if you're stressed, you lose your appetite. You can't really eat. You can't enjoy your food if you do eat.

It turns to cardboard in your mouth. David says, I'm sitting down. I've got the manna spread out before me right there in the presence of my enemies.

This is what he's talking about. This is what Peter is talking about back here in Acts chapter 4. And the apostles take this joy, even though they've been locked up, even though they've been falsely accused, even though they have tried to scare them and threaten them and browbeat them into not preaching anymore. Look at what they do in verse 23.

Being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. This is, by the way, a good example of what fellowship does for you. They weren't stoic.

They didn't go back and say, well, I'll just tell you that it was kind of stressful. They went back and they said, this is what happened. This is what we said.

This is what they said. This is what we said. This is what they said.

They let their fellow believers sort of help shoulder that load because there's a sense of relief. And it also redounds to the glory of God because God preserved them. And they were not executed.

They were not imprisoned. They weren't exiled. They weren't sent off to Rome or something.

When they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord. Notice, the way that these experiences are communicated results in everyone looking up and saying, don't we have a great and wonderful God? This should condition our fellowship and our communication. Do we share what we share in such a way that our hearts are lifted up to the Lord? Notice, with one accord, everyone has the same response to this information.

Whatever it is that Peter and John recounted, they say, God was surely with you. Look at who was up against you there and you're back. God was with you.

And with one accord, they lift up their voices and they say, Lord, you are God who made the heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them. By the mouth of your servant David have said, why do the nations rage and the people plot vain things? Now, look at this quote. I was trying to figure out why is this quote in here? I mean, it's obviously a song of praise, but what's the purpose of it? The kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers were gathered together.

Isn't that what we just saw? We saw the wealthy. We saw that John Hyrcanus. And we saw these other wealthy and influential people ranged against the apostles.

And when they come back, that's what they're talking about. They say the kings of the

earth, the rulers, the authorities, the powers that be, were ranged against us, gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ. For truly, against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.

And then they list the same types of authorities that they have just been in the presence of here. Here's your Herod and Pontius Pilate. There's your governmental authorities with the Gentiles and the people of Israel.

You've got the Gentiles who have got the social and political power. You've got the people of Israel who have the religious and the sort of tribal family power. They were all gathered together to do whatever your hand and your purpose determined before to be done.

Now, this is a very powerful acknowledgement that the people who think that they are running things and who think that they are making policy and setting the course of things are really not. They say they are doing whatever your hand and your purpose determined to be done. So Lord, look on their threats and grant to your servants that with all boldness they may speak your word by stretching out your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

Now, why do they pray that God will heal and that signs and wonders may be done? Because this is the harbinger, this is the sign, this is the trademark sort of that God is doing something new. Every time God starts a fresh dispensation, there are mighty supernatural signs and wonders. That's how he started the age of Israel with his negative expressions of power against the Egyptians and his positive expressions of power on behalf of Israel.

He's doing the same thing here. He's going to break jail bars open. He's going to overcome disease.

These are foretastes and foreshadowings of the kingdom and of the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Notice this takes place after they pray, and this is by way of an acknowledgement or a response.

Your message has been received. God gives them a visible sign that their prayer has been heard, and this is also by way of an approving response. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

Now, haven't they already been filled with the Spirit? Weren't they filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost? Didn't Jesus breathe on them the Holy Spirit before he ever left? Why does this say that they were filled with the Holy Spirit? This is a manifestation of that filling, isn't it? It is an exhibition of that filling. They spoke the word of God with boldness. This is sort of a broad brush over a period of time.

They didn't just walk out at that very moment, but their prayer was answered. God the Holy Spirit gave them enablement. Now, this is very interesting because think about our study in 1 Samuel with Saul.

After Samuel anoints him and gives him the prediction of what's going to happen, he meets the men who are prophesying and he joins the prophets. Samuel says, the Spirit is going to come upon you and then you do whatever comes to your hand. Whatever you decide to do.

God the Holy Spirit enables Saul to do whatever he decides he's going to do. In the same way that he enabled Samson in Judges 13, 14, and 15. You find the Spirit enabling him.

If he decides to slay a bunch of Philistines, the Spirit gives him strength. This is important because there is a widespread teaching and a widespread understanding in our Christian circles today where we get the idea that if you yield to the Holy Spirit, he will sort of take over thinking. A lot of people say, you know, I don't trust my judgment.

I know that I mess up a lot. But Lord, just use me. And there's a surrendering to the Holy Spirit.

And let the Spirit take control is something you hear a lot. When the Spirit controlled, there was a book that came out called Spirit Controlled Temperament. Well, control has the idea that you're sort of like a bulldozer with all those levers and gear shifts and things and the Holy Spirit just climbs into the driver's seat and as long as you're yielded, he can drive and go wherever he wants.

This is not the biblical model. We don't surrender and sort of just take our hands off the wheel and say, well, Holy Spirit, you drive. That's not what we're called to do.

That's too easy. If God just wanted some physical bodies to motor around with his Spirit, we wouldn't have a brain at all. We have to choose.

We have to think our way through problems and issues and challenges. We don't have the luxury of taking our hands off the wheel. Instead, we have the counsel.

What does the idea of a paracletas or paraclete mean? Jesus said, I will send you another comforter, a paraclete. He didn't say, I will send you a driver. I will send you a chauffeur and you just let him drive the car and you just go along for the ride.

God is not looking for people to surrender. God is looking for people to think and act and take responsibility, take a hold of the wheel and drive in a way that's pleasing to him. There are so many Christians today who think the key to the Christian life is surrender.

Let go and let God was a big catchphrase for a while. If you let go, you're going to crash. You can't let go.

That's not the call. We are to go forth and do the will of God with boldness. That is the example.

We don't let go. But you'll notice that in the Old Testament days especially, the filling of the Holy Spirit is an enablement, but people are still making their own choices. Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit and what does he decide to do? He does the dying cockroach with the pseudo prophets.

That was his choice. Samson just got angry. He not only got mad, he got even.

And when the Philistines cheated him on a bet and said, will you owe us 100 changes of clothes? He said, fine. And the Holy Spirit came on him mightily and went out and slew 100 Philistines and took their clothes and paid off his bet. He ties the fox's tails together and it talks about his anger burning.

God the Holy Spirit didn't make Samson angry. God the Holy Spirit didn't motivate him to do these things. He did it in the power of the Spirit.

We are enabled. We are gifted for whatever our hand finds to do. And we've got to be careful with that responsibility.

This is what the disciples do. And you notice they don't say, now, Lord, look on their threats and grant to your servants that your Spirit will speak through us or that your Spirit will take us where we need to go. They say, let us speak with boldness.

So, if there's one thing to remember out of this little section and the example of the apostles, we are accountable. We are responsible. There is no letting go of the wheel and waiting for God to grab it and steer us.

Our call is to solve the problem. There's nothing more frustrating as a teacher than to have a student who just throws up their hands and says, I don't know the answer. Why don't you work it for me? Here, I give you my paper.

You work the problem and fill in the answer. Right? That's not what we're after. The whole purpose of education is to teach someone to do their own problem solving, to become self-sufficient and self-sustaining.

And one of the worst things that can happen is to keep someone from being able to grow into that capability because we solve their problems for them. If their problem gets too tough, we just elbow them out of the way and we solve it for them. We don't let them make their mistakes.

We don't let them become self-sufficient. We don't let them stew in their own juice. We don't let them err and come short.

We don't let them go through a little bit of pain and a little bit of frustration. We're so

anxious that they not be frustrated and that they not go through pain that we want to leap in and solve it for them. Oh, I'm afraid you're getting frustrated.

They need to be frustrated. We need to be frustrated because we need to be pursuing the goal of a mature man. As it says in Ephesians chapter 4, we are going to be measured by the standard of a mature man.

And a mature man doesn't devolve or delegate or hand off problems. He tackles them and he solves them and he works his way through them. That's the measure of maturity.

Do you take accountability? Do you take responsibility? Do you chew whatever it is that's been portioned out on your plate? Or do you want to hand it to someone else? Oh, handle this. God the Holy Spirit enables us to bear our own burdens. Well, we saw this thing that looks like communism beginning in verse 32, but it isn't.

It was a special time. It was a special need. There were people who were living on sort of a wing and a prayer in Jerusalem because of the new events that were taking place.

And you will notice when it says, nor was there anyone in verse 34 among them who lacked, for all who were possessors of land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of things that were sold. Without going into laborious amounts of Greek, this is iterative. This is from time to time.

It doesn't mean that everybody in the church all went out and sold everything they had and put it in one big pot. The way this comes out when you read it is, as a need arose, well, here's two families that have run out of gas. They've run out of supplies.

We don't know what they're going to do. You know what? I've got the back 40 over there that's just laying fallow. I believe I'll sell that.

And we'll use that to meet this need. And so as anyone had need, one or another would find a way to come up with something that they could contribute. So they would bring the proceeds of the things that were sold and they laid them at the apostles' feet.

This is an important phrase when it says, laid it at the apostles' feet, because it means that they abandoned all claim and title to it. What do you think of when you think about laying something at someone's feet? It's a gift. It's a freewill offering, and you're not going to be in what they used to do.

It's probably politically incorrect now to say Indian giver, but I'm part Indian so I can say it. You know what it means to be an Indian giver. You give something and then you kind of want to take it back.

To lay something at someone's feet is to relinquish all claim and interest in it. You have donated, contributed, given it, and it is theirs completely to do with as they will. And this

is important for what's coming up in chapter 5. Now we have Joseph, as it says in verse 36, whose surname was Barnabas, Barnabee, son of the prophets, a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having sold land, brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

We have that same idea repeated. When the word of God repeats something, it's important. So I'm going to repeat it.

This contribution, this means of supplying the needs of the saints, was like the burnt offering in the Old Testament. It was a whole sacrifice. The entire thing is given.

In the sacrifices of the Old Testament, you didn't take the bull and chop off three or four of the best steaks and then give the carcass for the sacrifice. Because what you're giving is as unto the Lord. You're giving to the Lord, right? My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus.

It's a scripture that will be written later on from this time. But that's the principle. So these are similar to a sacrifice.

And you don't hack up a sacrifice and give God part of it. And that's the key. We will not understand Ananias and Sapphira if we look at this as, well, here's a needy person.

I'm going to give this person something. I'll sell my land and give them something. That's not what is in view here.

Everything is focused on the Lord. People see brethren in need and they remember the words of Jesus. If you so much as give a glass of water to one of these in my name, it is as though you have done it to me.

So this is a gift to the Lord. They are doing it as unto the Lord, just as though it was Jesus Christ who had come short of supplies. Well, would you chop the loaf of bread in half for the Lord or would you give Him the whole thing? Where is your heart toward the Lord? What is the Old Testament criteria? Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with most of your heart, with most of your soul, and most of your strength.

Some of your heart, some of your soul, some of your strength. A tithe of your soul. When something is going to be laid at the apostle's feet, that is essentially laid at the Lord's feet.

What are you laying at the feet of the Lord? Are you going to chop it up or are you going to give Him the whole thing? That's what is in view. And so twice it says that these individuals, once it's general and then here in 36 and 37, it's specific of Barnabas. He had some land.

He sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostle's feet. It is by way of a sacrifice, of a gift to God. That is the idea.

It was occasional. It was as someone had need. Everybody didn't sell everything and pool it.

Then this would not have been iterative. It would have been a one-time thing. They would have pooled the money, put it in a big account, and there wouldn't be any subsequent acts of selling.

But this was from time to time, over time. Okay, well we need to pause here and take our break. That's the last time we're going to go through chapter 4. When we come back, we'll start in chapter 5.