

Journey Through the New Testament

Acts 6 – 10

“The Spirit of New Beginnings”

5-19-19

Introduction

With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the number of believers was greatly multiplied and the apostles continued to perform miraculous healings. But along with the spread of the Good News, came persecution of the followers of “The Way.” Stephen was captured by Jews from the surrounding area and accused of speaking against the law of Moses. After a magnificent speech that recounted the story of God’s work among Israel, their forefathers and Jesus, Stephen was stoned. As persecution against the church in Jerusalem increased, the believers scattered throughout the region. Saul, another of the persecutors, had a dramatic encounter with Christ and a new mission to the Gentiles began.

Opening Thoughts

Peter, Stephen, and eventually Saul, received courage and wisdom to speak the truth of the gospel during opposition. These events help us to see the role of the Holy Spirit in believers’ lives. The Spirit is the presence of God made available to us. As we put our faith and trust in God’s Spirit, we too can experience power and courage to step out as faithful witnesses.

Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be renewed. (Prayer to the Holy Spirit, Adapted)

Background Information

1. Read Acts 7:51, 53. What accusation in Stephen’s speech upset the Jewish establishment?
2. Read Acts 22:3-4 for a quick snapshot of Paul’s background. “Paul” is the Hebrew name equivalent to Saul which was his Greco-Roman name.
3. Read Acts 8:1-3, 9:1-2. What was Saul’s response to the followers of “The Way?”

From Murder to Mission

Bible Study Acts 9:3-20 (CEB)

What?

1. What happened to Saul on his way to Damascus? (v. 3-9)

2. What did God have planned for Saul? (v. 15-16)
3. What was the role of Ananias? (v. 13-14)
4. What was he concerned about?

So What?

1. Saul's encounter with Christ was dramatic and life changing. What types of conversion experiences have you been aware of or experienced? Dramatic? Subtle? A gradual process? Discuss the fact that not everyone has the same experience.
2. What is important for us to understand about the broad range of conversion experiences?
3. So, in your spiritual journey, how have you encountered the Spirit of Christ? Through worship and preaching? Reading scripture? Talking with others? Through prayer? Through quiet reflection? (And more...)
4. God provided Ananias to assist and encourage Paul. So, who has helped you in your faith journey?
5. After Pentecost and Saul's conversion, what happened in the early church? (v. 31)
6. What made the growth of the church possible?

Now What?

1. The power of the Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to carry on the mission of Christ in spite of persecution. What would it be like to face persecution for our belief in Christ?
2. In what ways do we take religious freedom for granted?
3. What keeps you from being bolder in your faith?
4. How does your way of living reveal to others that you are a Christ follower?
5. Now that you have studied the role and power of the Holy Spirit, what could you do to be braver and more intentional as a disciple of Jesus?

Facts: North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan and Pakistan are the biggest threats to the Christian church. (*Christianity Today International*) Every month 345 Christians are killed for faith related reasons. 105 Churches or building are burned or attacked, 219 Christians are detained without trial, arrested, sentenced and imprisoned.

Closing *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know...his incomparably great power for us who believe. (Ephesians 1:18-19)*