



THEMES IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

WEEK FIVE: THE POWER OF TESTIMONY (1)

When the Holy Spirit moves through people and others see God working in wonderful ways, there will inevitably be opposition. This was true for the early church BUT as its ministry grew, opposition was countered by miraculous happenings. Maybe you think that these things were only for the early church, however, evidence proves that God still moves today. [Hebrews 13:8](#), a verse that every child in Sunday School would learn, says: *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.”*

What is testimony? The dictionary defines it as: (in law) a solemn declaration or statement: a statement under oath or affirmation: evidence, proof, confirmation: (Biblical) the law as set forth in the two tables, the decalogue, the word of God, the scriptures: to prove by evidence, to attest.

When God has answered prayer we can attest to others by sharing what has happened in our lives. Testimony can be as simple as telling someone that God met our need in a particular way. No one can argue with our experience. They may not always believe, but in the sharing of it, we are giving them the opportunity to see something of God’s grace.

In last week’s study we saw how God spoke separately to Peter and Cornelius and because they were both obedient, God was able to take the apostles and leaders into a whole new dimension: that of an all-inclusive church.

Read: [Acts 6:8 to end, and Chapter 7](#)

- For what reason was Stephen brought before the council?
- Note verse 15 *“And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel”*. What do people see in us?
- Verse 58 tells us that those who came to stone him laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. Verse 1 of Chapter 8 tells us that Saul was consenting to his death.
- Such was Saul’s belief that people of The Way must be destroyed in order to keep the Jewish faith, that he had no pity. Are we open to being generous and helpful to those of different faiths?

Read: [Acts 9](#)

“A Damascus Road experience” is a common expression even among people who make no profession of Christianity. What happened that day was so dramatic and powerful that it was, eventually, to lead to opening up the world to this wonderful gospel.

Saul was immersed in the Jewish tradition and teaching. Philippians 3:5:

“I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law.”

One writer says: *“If it were possible to gain salvation by obeying the Jewish ceremonial laws, the Apostle Paul would have been one of the best qualified ...”*

- What does this teach us about the gospel of Jesus Christ?
- Although Saul asks the question, *who are you Lord*, in effect he also answers it. What does this show us of the power of God?
- What was your experience of realising that Jesus Christ was the son of God and died for you? Write down the changes that have occurred in your life because of your encounter with Jesus.
- *“Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.”* This was Paul’s testimony prior to his being taken to Rome. (Acts 26:19). Our conversion was most likely not as dramatic as this, but it does show the importance of being obedient in telling others the good news.

For me, the star of this chapter is Ananias. (verses 10-19). Saul was well known for his vicious treatment of the followers of The Way so imagine how Ananias must have felt when the Lord spoke to him in a vision. He was given precise instructions as to where he should go and what he should do. (verses 11-12) In all fairness he did question because he knew what Saul had done and what he intended in Damascus.

- Verses 15-16 But the Lord said, *“Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name’s sake.”* What do we learn from these verses about the relationship between Ananias and the Lord?
- We hear nothing more about him but what an impact this little-known character had on history. When God asks you to do something for him and your response in effect questions God’s judgement, think about Ananias. He could have had no idea of the consequences. Pray and ask God to use you in his service. It will probably much less dramatic but of equal importance.

I have never forgotten the story of four men in Charlotte, North Carolina in the 1930s, during the Great Depression. So concerned were they about the lack of young men coming to know Jesus that decided to take a full day away from work and pray into the situation. Losing a day's pay during such a time would seem foolhardy to many people! They prayed all day and then returned to their homes. In the following months, the son of one of the men committed his life to God. He was Billy Graham, a man who has probably led more people to know Jesus than anyone. God can do great things through any of us PROVIDED WE ARE WILLING, FAITHFUL AND AVAILABLE.

Yet again we see problems. When Saul came to Jerusalem (he spent three years in Arabia after his conversion), the apostles did not believe he was genuine.

Read verse 27-28: *“Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus and how the Lord had spoken to Saul. He also told them that Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus in Damascus. So Saul stayed with the apostles and went all around Jerusalem with them, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.”*

It took a man of conviction, Barnabas, whose name means “son of encouragement”, to stand up and speak for Saul in front on the leaders. He shared how God has meet with Saul on the Damascus road and his subsequent testimony and preaching in Damascus. Saul had spoken boldly and disputed with the Hellenists, until they attempted to kill him. The leaders in Jerusalem had him return to his home city of Tarsus.

- How difficult is it to share your Christian faith with your family? Many people find it much easier to speak to strangers than people they know well. Is it because they know us too well? Are we afraid of their ridicule?
- In the Great Commission, Jesus says we must start at Jerusalem. In other words, start in the place where you live and then see what God will do with you.



Prayer

Father God, fill me with the Holy Spirit and give me courage to share testimony of your love with others.