



THEMES IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

WEEK TWO: TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS

James 1:2-4 *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, (fellow Christian believers), whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

Not, you might think, an encouraging beginning! However, the last sentence explains why it is necessary to go through trials. In everyday life we talk about having the rough edges chipped off us, we acknowledge the necessity of teaching children that life is not all about them and what they want. It is the same with our spiritual life, we need to learn that even though we are Christians, that does not mean that everything will be smooth and perfect. Whatever God allows in our lives, he will use to build up our faith and understanding so that we might grow to be more like Jesus.

1 Peter 5:8 *Be careful—watch out for attacks from Satan, your great enemy. He prowls around like a hungry, roaring lion, looking for some victim to tear apart.*

Read **Acts 4:1-22**

- Does this passage help you to understand what James and Peter wrote?
- Notice verse 2 – the Sadducees were so afraid of people believing that Jesus had risen from the dead, they decided to arrest Peter and John.
- Verse 4 however, shows the truth of **Romans 8:28** that God can turn all things for good – provided we love and serve him. In **Matthew 19:26** Jesus says that with God nothing is impossible. Every day after Pentecost, people were becoming believers and joining themselves to the apostles.
- We often think that we have nothing to offer God – that he is unable to use us. Read what verse 13 says about the way the Sanhedrin described Peter and John: *despite their boldness they were uneducated and untrained BUT they had been with Jesus.* Pray that God will give you confidence and boldness so that people will see you in the same light.

Read **Acts 4:22-37**

- Verses 29-31 show us how futile were the threats of the authorities. Trials will either make or break you. Take encouragement from what the disciples said and did despite the potential dangers.

We can look to the Old Testament to see examples of this trust and belief in God. In Genesis 40 we read how Joseph, who probably spent 12 years in prison, innocent of the charges against him, was able to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and baker. This led to him being asked to explain Pharaoh's dream and eventually, to becoming second only to the ruler himself. Not only did he triumph over his enemies, God used him to save many lives from the famine.

In Daniel 1-3, we read the story of Daniel and his three friends refusing to bow down and worship the image of Nebuchadnezzar. His friends were thrown into a furnace but God delivered them to the extent they came out not even smelling of smoke. Daniel was thrown into the lions' den but God miraculously shut up the mouths of the beasts and Daniel came out alive.

- Trials will come in our lives but if we trust in God, he will bring us through. Write down times in your life when God has made something good come out of something seemingly very difficult or even, evil. Again, by doing this we are building up memorials in our lives to God's goodness.

Read Acts 5:12-32

How quickly the Apostles and believers began to do the works that Jesus had commanded them in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:14-18). It is wonderful to read that people brought the sick out into the streets, laying them on beds and couches so that even the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.

- What does this tell us about the peoples' faith? Did they perhaps remember having seen Jesus perform miracles of healing?

2 Timothy 2:8-11 *"Always remember that Jesus Christ, a descendant of King David, was raised from the dead. This is the Good News I preach. And because I preach this Good News, I am suffering and have been chained like a criminal. **But the word of God cannot be chained.** So I am willing to endure anything if it will bring salvation and eternal glory in Christ Jesus to those God has chosen. This is a trustworthy saying: If we die with him, we will also live with him".*

- Notice that wonderful sentence: BUT THE WORD OF GOD CANNOT BE CHAINED (OR BOUND). Write down your understanding of this scripture.
- How does it relate to what was happening in the book of Acts.

In verses 17-32 of Acts 5, we read how the Apostles were put on trial and how God miraculously brought them out of prison. Again, the authorities told them to stop preaching and teaching, but to no avail. Their response was *“We ought to obey God rather than men.”*

- How far are we prepared to go to obey God?

There is an interesting section at the end of Chapter 5, verses 33-42. Gamaliel, a prominent teacher (who taught Saul of Tarsus), gave the authorities some very sensible advice: *“... keep away from these men and let them alone: for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it – lest you even be found to fight against God.”*

- This sometimes needs to be applied in our lives today. We fight against what God is wanting from us and sometimes we realise and learn. At other times we fail to understand that if God has asked something of us, he has already equipped us to do it.
- Are you aware of times in your life when this has happened? What was the short term outcome and what was the long term?

Read the following passage from Paul in 2 Corinthians 11-23-39: *“In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in peril of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness – beside the other things,....*

And we think at times we have it tough! The most important thing in our lives whether in **trials or triumphs**, is that we need to know we are walking in God’s will and have his approval.

Psalm 25: 1-11 – verse 4: Show me your ways O Lord; teach me your paths.

Read all these verses as a prayer to God.

