

The Bigger Story – Believe

Week Twenty-Five: Salvation

Notes & Discussion Questions on Acts 3:1-10

Acts 2:43 says many signs and wonders were done through the apostles. This one specific example.

Peter and John were *not* going to the temple at the hour of sacrifice, but at the hour of prayer that followed *just after* the afternoon sacrifice. The sacrificial system was fulfilled in the perfect sacrifice Jesus offered on the cross. **Why is this significant?**

The Gate Beautiful: Located on the temple mount, made of brass, 75 feet high with huge double doors.

Acts 3:3: The lame man asked for alms. He wanted to be supported in the condition he was currently in... but God had something better in mind: a complete change condition. **How does Jesus completely change/transform our condition?**

Acts 3:5: **Why is it significant that Peter** “fixed his attention” (eyes) on him?

Acts 3:6: **What is the significant and power of the name of Jesus?**

- Peter gave this man healing and power in the name of Jesus (Read Philippians 2:9-10)
- But this cannot be given until it is first held in his own life... Many want to be able to say, “rise up and walk” without having received the power of Jesus to transform their own life. **Discuss.**
- “It is not the Church’s business in this world to simply make the present condition more bearable; the task of the Church is to release here on earth the redemptive work of God in Christ.” (LaSor) **Do you agree?**

Acts 3:7: **Why is it significant that Peter** “took him by the right hand and raised him up”? **How does this reflect the way Jesus healed and cared for the people?** (Read 1 Corinthians 12:9) This was something Peter did after a prompting and empowerment of the Spirit.

Acts 3:8: As soon as he was healed, the man:

1. Immediately started to use what God had given him (“walking, leaping”)
2. Attached himself to the apostles (“entered the temple with them”)
3. Began to praise and worship God (“praising God”)

How do you understand this response? How did others respond? What can you learn from this story?

According to Acts 4:22, he was over 40 years old and was crippled since birth. He was a regular outside the temple gates (Acts 3:10) and Jesus may very well have passed by him without healing him (not unlike the multitudes described in John 5:1-16) **How do you have peace with the justice, healing and timing of God?** God’s timing is just as important as His will. It was for the glory of God that Jesus healed this man from heaven through Peter (see Mark 16:20). **Discuss.**

This Week’s Readings

2 Kings 18 Acts 1	2 Kings 19-21 Acts 2	2 Kings 22-23	2 Kings 24-25 Acts 3	1 Chron 1-2 Acts 4	1 Chron 3-5
Isaiah 35:1-10, Psalm 119:25-32, Acts 3:1-10, Matthew 9:1-8					

Notes & Discussion Questions on Matthew 9:1-8

Jesus forgives and heals a paralyzed man in Capernaum (see also Mark 2 and Luke 5 and read of the prophetic role of Jesus healing many in Isaiah 35:5-6)

Verse 2: “When Jesus saw their faith”

- Jesus saw the faith of his friends, not of the paralyzed man himself. **Discuss.**
- **How does Jesus encourage the paralyzed man’s faith?** (“take heart!”)
- The faith of his friends brought him to Jesus, but Jesus addressed his greater ailment.

Why would Jesus deal with the sin issue first? Because sin is the root from which all our evils come.

What does addressing this first show?

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

Notes & Discussion Questions on Matthew 9:1-8, Continued

- Forgiveness is more important than bodily healing
- The most important thing Jesus came to do was to deal with sin
- When a man's sins are forgiven, he becomes a son of God
- The response to faith is the forgiveness of sin

Matthew 9:3-5: The reaction of the religious leaders and Jesus knowing their hearts (see Psalm 103:3)

- Jesus answers what they said within themselves, showing how our thoughts/opinions are open to God and of interest to Him. **Discuss.**
- The scribes correctly understood Jesus claimed to do something only God can do. And then He knew their thoughts (proving His deity and power!) They were incorrect assuming that Jesus was not God. **What questions and assumptions have you heard about Jesus? How do you answer that Jesus is God?**

Matthew 9:6-8: Jesus is God and has authority over sin and disease and the power to forgive
Jesus answered His own question: since He could heal the man, it gave proof of His claim to also have the authority to forgive sins. **Read** the crowds' reaction (verse 8) and **discuss** Jesus' authority and giving God glory.

Notes & Discussion Questions on Psalm 119:25-32

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible. There are **22** sections, corresponding to the **22** letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each section has **8** verses, each written in alphabetic acrostic form, so every verse of that section begins with the same letter. This Psalm is about delighting in God's Word and the blessings of Scripture.

Daleth 7: Revived from the dust

Psalm 119:25: The psalmist uses strong wording to describe how he felt near dust and death, weak and melting, and yet, the Word of God can give life and revive him! **How?**

- Revival comes from a sense of spiritual need and lowliness. Revival (in both the Biblical and historical sense) is marked by a humble awareness of sin and an urgency to confess and make things right... notice he didn't ask for comfort or prosperity but more of God and His Word. He is strengthened in Him (verse 28)

Psalm 119:26-27: Teach me, make me understand

- The psalmist understood that he needed more than knowledge; he needed understanding. The verbiage here indicates a profound understanding of what God's Word reveals about the nature of God, the gospel and His ways. **How does God grant understanding, knowledge and give Himself?**
- So, the psalmist would meditate on God's wonderful works. **How can you do likewise? Ask God for more knowledge, wisdom, understanding? More of Him?**
- **Discuss**: "The Bible is a remarkable fountain: the more one draws and drinks of it, the more it stimulates thirst." Martin Luther

Psalm 119:30-32: Choosing the way of truth:

- In verse 25, he was clinging to dust, now he is clinging to God's Word. He was low and sorrowful, now he is running with all his strength in the race God's Word sets before him. **What changed?**
- In verse 30, it says he has "chosen the way of faithfulness" **What does it mean to choose the way of faithfulness?**
- "Men do not drop into the right way by chance; they must choose it, and continue to choose it, or they will soon wander from it."- Charles Spurgeon **How do you "choose it and continue to choose it"?**
- The psalmist was able to choose the way of truth as he was in close relationship with the Word of God...He set God's rules before him and clings to God's testimonies. **Discuss** these action words, his dependence upon God. **Discuss** his progression, from confessing to choosing to clinging to running.

Believe Next Week's Readings: Justification

1 Chron 6-7 Acts 5	1 Chron 8-10 Acts 6	1 Chron 11-12 Acts 7	1 Chron. 13-16	1 Chron 17-19 Acts 8	1 Chron 20-22
Isaiah 43:8-11, Psalm 119:33-40, Acts 4:1-12, John 14:1-6					

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Week Twenty-Six: Justification

Notes & Discussion Questions on John 14:1-6

John 14:1: An impetrative command to calm the troubled heart with trust and hope in Jesus

- “Stop being troubled” “Set your heart at ease”
- Jesus promised that we could have an untroubled heart *even in a troubled life*... He told His disciples where to put their trust... in Him, as in God the Father. **Why is there hope in Jesus?**

John 14:2-4: Reasons for a calmed heart: A future reunion in the Father’s house.

- In Greek, “mansions” is better translated “dwelling places.” However, knowing God’s nature, it is better translated “mansions”... whatever place God has for us in heaven, it will be as glorious as a mansion!
- This shows Jesus planning... *He* went to the cross. *He* goes to prepare a place, in *His* time and control.
- He is the Bridegroom of the Church and, like the ancient wedding custom, He will prepare a place for His bride, coming back for her (see 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17) so that we are united with Jesus.
- We take comfort in knowing that, as He prepares a place for us, He also prepares us for that place. **Discuss sanctification.**

John 14:5-6: Jesus is the exclusive way to the Father – **what does it mean that this is the exclusive way?**

- The Bible consistently presents One True God and Jesus is consistently presented as the only true way to the One True God. **Discuss. Read Isaiah 43:10-11. How does this connect? With Acts 4:12?**
- Jesus didn’t just show a way: *He is the way*. He didn’t only teach truth: *He is the truth*. Jesus didn’t offer secrets to life: *He is the life*. He was, and is, *the only way to God*.
 - **Why do you believe this? Why do others shrink from it?** Many don’t mind saying that Jesus is a way to God, but other religions have their own ways to God. **Discuss.**
 - Many think it isn’t fair for God to make only one way. **Why is it this way? Discuss.**

This Week’s Readings

1 Chron 6-7	1 Chron 8-10	1 Chron 11-12	1 Chron. 13-16	1 Chron 17-19	1 Chron 20-22
Acts 5	Acts 6	Acts 7		Acts 8	

Isaiah 43:8-11, Psalm 119:33-40, Acts 4:1-12, John 14:1-6

Notes & Discussion Questions on Acts 4:1-12

Acts 4:1-4: The arrest of Peter and John after the lame man is healed

- “came upon them” = a sudden seizing of Peter and John. “Laid hands of them” intended to make them afraid (see Acts 4:21). **Why were they facing opposition? Why is the Gospel radical? Divisive? (John 14:5)**
- Acts 4:1-6 lists **11** different groups/individuals opposing Jesus’ followers:
 - Groups: Priests and the Sadducees (Acts 4:1), Rulers, elders, scribes (Acts 4:5) and others from the family of the high priest (Acts 4:6)
 - Individuals: Captain of the temple (Acts 4:1), Annas, Caiaphas, John and Alexander (Acts 4:6)
- The Sadducees did not believe in the afterlife, angels or the resurrection
 - Later, (verse 12) Peter didn’t claim Jesus was *a way* of salvation, but **THE ONLY** way of salvation (see John 14:6) **What does this mean? How does it connect with Jesus’ earlier words?**
 - There is no salvation in any other, there is no other name by which we are saved. **How is this consistent throughout Scripture? Why is this hard to accept?**
- Verse 11: “This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone’”
 - From Psalm 118:22, describing how Jesus was rejected by men, by those leaders, but was exalted by His Father, by God
 - Psalm 118 continues: “This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it”
 - **Discuss the timing and the plans of God. How are you glad in the day He has made?**

Acts 4:4 shows that the power plays, threats and intimidation was all ineffective. More people started following Jesus, not less. Despite the opposition coming against the gospel, the number of Christians kept increasing, growing to 5,000 from 3,000 since Acts 2:41. **Discuss the power of the Holy Spirit.**

Acts 4:5-7: Peter and John are brought before the Sanhedrin (a scene of power/intimidation). **Why were the Sanhedrin against them? What is their response? Peter and John's? Yours?**

Yet, Acts 4:8-12: Peter boldly preaches to the Jewish leaders.

- Peter filled with the Spirit again (verse 8), has the boldness and ability to speak the Gospel directly to the heart of the matter. **Compare with Peter's sermon from Acts 2.**
- Peter preached Jesus, the Jesus they crucified, the Jesus God raised from the dead, the Jesus who healed this lame man. This is the starting point of everything: Jesus. **Discuss. What other sermons follow this pattern? Why is this the starting point? Connect back with Jesus as the Cornerstone.**

Notes & Discussion Questions on Psalm 119:

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible. There are **22** sections, corresponding to the **22** letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each section has **8** verses, each written in alphabetic acrostic form, so every verse of that section begins with the same letter. This Psalm is about delighting in God's Word and the blessings of Scripture.

He 7: A plea for guidance and life: "He" is the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It is used at the beginning of verbs to make them causative, so the prayers in this section have the meaning: "Cause me to learn," "Cause me to understand," "Cause me to walk," etc.

Psalm 119:33-35: A prayer for instruction for righteous living: The psalmist describes his desire to keep the Way and Word of God. He asks for God to teach him, so that he can keep the way to the end

- "to the end" means without time limit or reservation, with every part of self.
- We need Godly understanding to persevere in the faith: **Can you recall Biblical examples of asking for Godly understanding / wisdom? Preserving in the faith? What can we learn from these examples?**

Psalm 119:36-37: **What is the problem with selfishness and focusing on material things?**

- The psalmist prayed for God to enable him to turn away his eyes and attention from things of little value: "The prayer is not so much that the eyes may be shut as 'turned away;' for we need to have them open, but directed to right objects." (Charles Spurgeon)
- **How does a heart inclined to God and His Word satisfy? How can we delight in the Word? What are you distracted by?**
- Biblical examples of the dangers of covetousness: Genesis 4:6-8, 2 Samuel 11:2-17, John 12:6). **Why are we drawn towards the worthless?**

Psalm 119:38-40: Longing for revival from God's Word.

- "Establish Your word to Your servant" carries the same idea as what Mary said to Gabriel regarding the word of the Lord that he brought to her: "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). **How can we pray similarly?**
- The psalmist request for revival comes from his heart, which loves God's Word. **How can we pray for revival, personally and as a church?**

Believe Next Week's Readings:

1 Chron. 23-25	1 Chron 26-29	2 Chron 1	2 Chron 2-5	2 Chron 6	2 Chron 7-9
Acts 9		Acts 10	Acts 11	Acts 12	
Jonah 4, Psalm 119:41-48, Acts 7:54-8:4, John 15:18-27					

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Week Twenty-Seven: Persecution

Notes & Discussion Questions on Acts 7:54-60

Read Stephen’s full sermon, then Colossians 3:2-3

Acts 7:54: The council’s reaction to the sermon of Stephen

- Stephen’s message was true and they could not dismiss it, reacting in rage.
- “gnashed their teeth” Angry, grinding of the teeth in rage. Jesus describes hell as a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12).

Acts 7:55-56: Stephen’s vision of Jesus

- **Contrast** Stephen (full of the Holy Spirit) with the counsel (full of rage)
 - *How is the Holy Spirit the source of Stephen’s courage, wisdom and power?*
 - *How does Stephen trust in the Lord without anxiety or fear* (see Jeremiah 17:7-8)?
- “Jesus standing at the right hand of God”: Jesus is standing, not sitting (Matthew 26:64, Colossians 3:1)
 - He could be standing in solidarity with Stephen
 - He could be standing to welcome Stephen, the first martyr
 - He could be standing to declare Stephen before God (Matthew 10:32)
- “Stephen has been confessing Christ before men, and now he sees Christ confessing his servant before God.” Bruce

Acts 7:57-58: The execution of Stephen by stoning

- **What was it that pushed the Sanhedrin to stone Stephen?** His declaring Jesus was standing at the right hand of God. The Sanhedrin didn’t recognize Jesus as God and this was considered blasphemy.
 - “ran at him” this is the same word used to describe the pigs running into the sea (Mark 5:13), out-of-control, animalistic, unthinking behavior
 - This is a group of older, professional men. And they, they “stopped their ears” and yelled.
 - This is typical of those who reject God, those lost in spiritual insanity. They wail in agony and covered their ears at the revelation of God, which they regarded as blasphemy. **Discuss.**
- Saul (Paul) is introduced as a member of the Sanhedrin, who approved of Stephen’s execution (Acts 8:1, 26:10-11, 1 Corinthians 15:9, Philippians 3:6).

Acts 7:59-60: Stephen’s life ended in the same way it had been lived: Trusting God, believing that Jesus would take care of him in the life to come. **Discuss.**

- Stephen requests forgiveness for his murders. **Why?**
 - God answered Stephen’s prayer, later turning the heart of a man who agreed with his stoning... God heard Stephen’s prayer, and Paul is the evidence of it. We have no idea how greatly God can use us in our times of suffering.
- “He fell asleep” Very tender language carrying the idea that he would wake up in a much better place... true for believers! **Discuss.**
- Stephen fell asleep and the Church woke up to the persecution abounding. **What does the Church need to “wake up” to today?**

This Week’s Readings

1 Chron. 23-25	1 Chron 26-29	2 Chron 1	2 Chron 2-5	2 Chron 6	2 Chron 7-9
Acts 9		Acts 10	Acts 11	Acts 12	
Jeremiah 17:5-8, Psalm 119:41-48, Acts 7:54-8:4, John 15:18-27					

Notes & Discussion Questions on Acts 8-1-4

Acts 8:1: Saul “consented” to his death, this word more closely means “to approve, to be pleased with.” Some take pleasure in attacking Christians, the name of Jesus. **Discuss.**

- Previously, the apostles had been arrested, beaten and persecuted. Beginning now, every believer was threatened with violence and some with death. **Why is the church persecuted?**

- **How can God use all, even this persecution?** This scattered the church – pushing them to share Jesus out in the surrounding areas (Acts 1:8)
 - There are two types of the word “scattered” One has the idea of scattering in the sense of making something disappear, like scattering someone’s ashes. The other word has the idea of scattering in the sense of planting or sowing seeds. This is the ancient Greek word used here. **How does this connect with sharing the Gospel?**

Acts 8:2: The burial of Stephen by devout men

- Jewish law prohibited open mourning over an executed individual, yet these men mourned.

Acts 8:3-4: Saul continues his persecution.

- “Havoc” This Greek word could refer to an army destroying a city or a wild animal tearing at its meat. Saul viciously attacked Christians, including women (9:1; 22:4; 26:10). It is in the imperfect form so he “kept ravaging it”
- Yet...the end result was for the glory of God as the scattered went everywhere, preaching. The persecution spread and strengthened the message. **Discuss.**
- **How can we share the good news of what Jesus has done in our lives?**
- “In every church where there is really the power of the Spirit of God, the Lord will cause it to be spread abroad, more or less. He never means that a church should be like a nut shut up in a shell; nor like ointment enclosed in a box. The precious perfume of the gospel must be poured forth to sweeten the air.” Charles Spurgeon

Notes & Discussion Questions on Psalm 119

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible. There are **22** sections, corresponding to the **22** letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each section has **8** verses, each written in alphabetic acrostic form, so every verse of that section begins with the same letter. This Psalm is about delighting in God’s Word and the blessings of Scripture.

Waw 1: Liberty comes from loving God’s Word

Psalm 119:41-42: **How do mercy and salvation come to us through and according to God’s Word?**

- “Mercies” here is “hesed”: steadfast love, faithfulness, loving-kindness, grace, compassion...
 - “Hesed” is not merely an emotion but an action, a love/loyalty which inspires merciful and compassionate behavior to another
 - It is found **250** times in the Old Testament, describing God’s character (Exodus 20:6)
- Notice the plural use of “mercies” as God is so great and kind to us that His mercy can only be described in the plural. “Mercies piled on top of mercies.” **Discuss.**

Psalm 119:43-44: By the grace and goodness of God, His Word dwells with us: We can pray that it may continue to

- The psalmists’ past hope guides his present/future expectations...**How has God’s faithfulness in the past motivated your dependence upon him in the present?**
- **How can you glorify God through obedience to His Word?**

Psalm 119:45-48: **How does God’s Word bring liberty? Freedom? Confidence? Delight?**

- Obedience, seeking God’s word/wisdom leads to liberty. Disobedience, rejection of God’s word, and reliance upon one’s own wisdom lead to bondage. **Discuss.**
- “I will speak of Your testimonies also before king, and I will not be ashamed”
 - **How can we have the boldness to speak freely of God and His words, undaunted by the audience? How does this God-given courage also give us liberty?**
- **How is delighting in God’s Word a choice?**

Love Next Week’s Readings: Nothing without Love

2 Chron. 10-13	2 Chron 14-17	2 Chron 18-19	2 Chron 20-22	2 Chron 23-24	2 Chron 25-27
Acts 13		Acts 14	Acts 15		Acts 16

Zechariah 9:9-12, Psalm 119:49-56, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, Matthew 11:25-30