



Acts: The Story Continues
Week 4: Seeing Clearly
April 28, 2024

Bring any notes you may have (Engage & Grow, notes from reading Acts 9-12, etc.)

Icebreaker: If you could go back in time and see any moment in history, what event would you choose?

Opening Discussion: What do you recall, or what stands out to you from Sunday's message?

Digging Deeper:

Read Acts 9:1-22

Saul wasn't just opposed to Christians, he was their enemy. Being a hyper-religious Pharisee, he was the one giving the approval for the death of Christians like Stephen. Saul was so zealous for God that he was ready, willing, and able to stomp out those he perceived to be against God. It wasn't until he had an encounter with Jesus Christ Himself that the reality hit him that *he* was in fact, the party that was going against God. Blinded by the light of Christ's glory, Saul was forced to live in darkness and complete dependence. But it was in this darkness that Saul could truly see.

Where God had just taken away Saul's vision, He then gives a vision to the disciple named Ananias. Ananias begins to describe to God what Saul has done, but God responds by describing to Ananias what He will do through Saul. He obeys and finds Saul in the house of a man named Judas, and Saul's sight is restored and he is baptized.

Saul, who was weakened in his blindness and fasting (v.9), has now received the Holy Spirit and boldly proclaims Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. After his conversion, we see him grow continuously in strength (v.19 and v.22).

- Ananias greets Saul as his "brother" (v.17). How hard do you think that was for Ananias? How impactful do you think that was for Saul?

- Read **Acts 5:34-39**. Saul was taught by Gamaliel and now ignores his advice to the Sanhedrin. What do Saul's actions here tell us about him?
- What things has Jesus done to get your attention?
- Who has played the role of Ananias in your life?
- As someone who was taught by Paul, what significance do you think this passage had in Luke's life? What do you think he was feeling as he was writing it?

Read Acts 10:44-48

This chapter opens with a string of visions. It starts with a Roman centurion (about the least likely person you'd expect) named Cornelius having a clear vision of an angel coming to him and instructing him to send for the apostle Peter who was staying in a city roughly 30 miles away. As the centurion's representatives were on their journey to Joppa, Peter receives a cryptic vision involving "something like a great sheet descending" from heaven with "all kinds of animals" in it (**v.11-12**). In the vision a voice instructs Peter to kill and eat the animals, which was considered unlawful to Jews (see **Leviticus 11**). Coming from a Jewish background, Peter replies "I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean," to which the voice responds "What God has made clean, do not call common." As Peter was puzzling over the meaning of this vision, the Spirit prompted him to get up and meet the representatives who were sent for him. Peter and some Jewish Christians accompany them back to Caesarea to meet the centurion and the meaning of the vision becomes clear. God was showing Peter that no one should be called common or unclean (**v.28**).

God then uses Peter to show all who were present how "the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even to Gentiles" (**v.45**). In this, God has not only changed how He gives the Holy Spirit (this is the first time since Pentecost that the laying on of hands was not involved), but He's changed the perception of who the recipients of the Holy Spirit are! The Gentiles who were there could be heard speaking in tongues, which means they are united by the same Spirit who was poured out on Pentecost in **Acts 2:2-7**.

- What kind of person would you have the most trouble going to if God asked you to go to their house?
- Is there anyone in your life that you might consider “common” or “unclean”?
- Even though Cornelius is described as being “an upright and God-fearing man” (**v.21**), he would have still been regarded as a pagan unless he fully submitted to Jewish practices. What do you think **v.28** would have meant to him?

Read Acts 11:19-30

We read here of some unnamed Christians adding to the work of Philip and Peter in preaching to Gentiles, namely in Antioch. Antioch was the cultural center for the Roman Empire. It was prime real estate for all kinds of industry, which made it really attractive to immigrants who brought different ideas of religion into the area. Tourists and traders joined the full-time residents to make Antioch one of the biggest and most important cities in the first century. Yet the bold preaching of Jesus by these displaced Christians led to the conversion of so many people that it changed the religious landscape of this pagan society, leading to the formation of the first Christian church outside of Jerusalem. More than that, it changed what believers were known as. Formerly known as those “belonging to the Way” (**Acts 9:2**), followers of Jesus are for the first time called Christians (**11:26**). So we see that from its inception, God’s Church consists of insiders (Jews - **Acts 1-7, 9**), outsiders (Gentiles - **Acts 10**), and those with a foot in the door (**Acts 8**).

- Why do you think that Christians were formerly referred to as people who belonged to the Way? What is meant by “the Way”?
- What changes can you make at your work/in your home/with your family to live a more God-honoring life?

Read Acts 12:1-19

The setting here is moved back to Jerusalem...and things aren't looking good. James is killed by Herod—the first of the Twelve to be killed—and Peter is once again arrested after returning to Jerusalem to presumably celebrate the Passover. Peter was placed under the heaviest kind of guard, likely in Herod's own palace. We are told that this was “during the days of Unleavened Bread,” which meant that the Jews were celebrating Passover. We can assume, then, that Herod may have intended to duplicate Jesus's execution using one of His most prominent followers.

God sent an angel to deliver Peter from Herod's plan by leading him out of prison. Peter goes to the house of Mary, the mother of the author of the Gospel of Mark, who was hosting the church in Jerusalem for a prayer gathering (v.5). After praying for Peter's release, he now stands at the door knocking, yet they refuse to believe it was actually him. All except for a young maid named Rhoda, who answers the door and sees him.

- How would you have reacted if you were praying in Mary's house, heard the knock, and were told that it was Peter (who you believe to be in prison) at the door?
- When has an answered prayer left you in disbelief?
- After learning of Peter's escape, why do you think Herod went to Caesarea?

Moving Forward: What might be “imprisoning” you now? Pray with bold expectation this week for God to rescue you.

Prayer

Next Session: *Bring your Engage & Grow notebooks from Sunday and read Acts 13-15.*