

As God's people, we want to be guided by His Word and empowered by His Spirit to look more like Jesus. This Scripture Guide is based on this morning's passage to further equip you with what God's Word says.

Week 7 Acts 4:23-37

Overview

This next section of Luke complements the previous section. Where Peter and John declared boldly the resurrection and glory of the risen Christ, the disciples of Jesus then prayed and lived boldly. It also acts as an immediate reminder of what this movement was to become.

Scripture Guide

v.23 Peter and John are released from captivity and immediately go back to report what has happened to the rest of Jesus' disciples. In response, the group begins to pray to the Lord. This prayer has 2 major themes: God's divine plan and boldness in the face of persecution. These both intertwine with each other and are necessary for God's people to move forward the kingdom.

vv.21-25 They begin by addressing God as, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and earth and the sea and everything in them (Acts 4:24)". They begin with this reminder to cry out the glory of God through his creation as well as to remind themselves that God has been active in human affairs from the beginning. He set all of this in motion as it is recorded in the book of Genesis¹. With this in mind, they reference the author of the Psalm, David, the former King of Israel. Way back in 2 Samuel 8:16 God declared that, "Your throne shall be established forever" to David before the temple was built. The disciples intentionally remind themselves about God's plan through His glorious creation and that there is eternally a descendant of David on the throne wielding power given to him by God. It is a great summation of who Jesus is, as we see that He is the, "Firstborn of all creation (Col 1:15)" and also "descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power" (Rom 1:3-4).

vv.26-31 With this in mind, the disciples then pray using Psalm 2, which was written by David. The psalm describes the futility of the Gentiles in gathering together and fighting the Lord's anointed (משיח, or *mashiah*, where we get the word Messiah). David wrote hundreds of years before to describe the triumph of Israel as God's anointed over surrounding Gentile nations. This reminder is also messianic in nature as it describes how embassies of the Roman empire were the ones who killed Jesus, as the disciples point out in the next part of their prayer. All of this occurred according to the predestination of God. After reflecting on the all-knowing, all-powerful God and His hand through creation, the disciples then pray to "speak your word with all boldness (4:29)" in the face of the same oppression and collusion that was already beginning to happen. Notably, they do not pray for an end to suffering or persecution, yet they pray to brace themselves through it. While they speak with boldness, they have confidence that God will already be healing and performing signs and wonders to proclaim the name of Jesus. Following their prayer, the house they were gathering in was shaken, to denote the presence of the Lord² and they were again filled with the Holy Spirit³ to continue speaking boldly for the kingdom.

¹ Gen 1:1-31, Gen 12:1-4, Gen 15:1-6. God promised a lineage and a blessing to Abraham, who passed on those promises to his children.

² See Exo 19:18, Ps 114:7, or Isa 6:4 for example.

³ This is not to suggest that they were "baptized again" or that the Spirit left them until then, but is to reemphasize that their mission is not hindered by the persecution of the leaders.

vv.32-35 The next section acts as a repeat of Acts 2:42-47, with Luke describing how the early church loves and helps each other. Again, the demand by the leaders to stop exclaiming the name of Jesus has been ignored by the disciples in favor of what God wants from them. Repeating from earlier, Luke says that the disciples have “everything in common (4:32)” and “there was not a needy person among them (4:34).” The reference to having “everything in common” could be an allusion to Aristotle’s treatise on friendship as this phrase is quoted in Pythagorean communities⁴, while there being no needy people among them alludes to Deuteronomy 15:4, indicating that both pagan and biblical ideas have been fulfilled in the early community.⁵ Additionally, the proceeds were laid at the apostles’ feet (4:34-35) which sounds similar to the idea described in Revelation 4:10, where the elders lay their crowns before the throne. The common idea is to lay our earthly values before God for him to do what He wishes with them.⁶ John Crysostom expounds on this idea in his Letter. “The Christian ought to regard all the things that are given him for his use, not his to hold as his own or to lay up. Moreover, giving careful heed to all things as the Lord’s, he should not overlook any of the things that are being thrown aside and disregarded, should this be the case.”⁴ Meaning, they give up their possessions to the Lord and by doing so support the Lord’s people that are thrown aside and discarded.

vv.36-37 Spurred on by this community fulfilling ideas of the early church, Luke records that a Levite named Joseph (or Barnabas) sells his field and lays the money at the disciples feet. Luke highlights this man in particular to reinforce the communities’ attachment fulfilling the Old Testament. Levites worked at the temple and were expected to survive off what the rest of the community tithed and gave to the priests and Levites⁷. It seems as though Levites could own land and fields as indicated in Lev 25:29-34, yet this act sticks out as a token of obedience, as now Baranabas’ only income is attached to the gifts to the temple and allegorically upon the blessings of Jesus. This may have been the Barnabas known for traveling with Paul, which further shows his and the apostles’ fervor by which they sought to spread the gospel.

Conclusion

The common theme in this passage is the idea of faithfulness. The disciples exclaimed God’s continued faithfulness through their prayer by tracing God’s actions from creation to their present day. He worked through His servants in the Old and New Testaments to bring a day when all of His promises ring true. In awe and humbled by their God, the disciples set out to be continually faithful in their mundane and simple lives. They met together, shared with each other, and gave freely to those in need. Doing so humbly proclaims God’s love for everyone on earth.

⁴ Iamblichus. *Pythagoric Life*. (T. Taylor, Trans.). Project Gutenberg. Chapter XVIII. Therefore this phrase is more historical in nature and not a way to interject Marxism into Christianity.

⁵ Oden, T. C., & Martin, F. (2006). *Ancient Christian commentary on scripture: Acts*. InterVarsity Press.

⁶ Additionally, Jerome remarks that laying their possessions in front of the disciples feet is a “symbolic act designed to show that people must trample on covetousness.” Jerome. *Epistulae*.

⁷ Num 18:21-32