

ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Small Group

Bible Study

Overview

In August, we are looking at Acts 5 to Acts 7, with a study of Hebrews 10:24-25 in between.

In Acts 5:1-11, we will see the work of Satan counterfeiting as the work of Holy Spirit in Ananias and Sapphira, and how the reigning Christ would purge greed and hypocrisy from His church to instil the fear of God in His people, thus sifting out those who are His from those who are not.

Then we will study in Acts 6:1-7, how the word of God grew through the apostolic leadership despite differences and problems that threatened the unity of the church. It will teach us the priority of the word and prayer ministry, and the importance of godly servant leaders to ensure the unhindered preaching of the gospel in the midst of competing challenges.

Hebrew 10:24-25 is then an apt inclusion into this series to remind us once again the motivation and the objective of our gathering as a faith community in the light of the great and coming Day of the Lord.

Finally, the last study in Acts 7:1-53 will point us back to God's hand in the outworking of Israel's history, of how Moses, the Law, and the Temple are now superseded by Christ who is the true heart and centre of that history. Consequently, while rooted in Israel's faith, the church is called to look to Christ as the true fulfilment of the Old Testament hope and promises, and so to rise above oppositions and challenges in faith and courageous obedience to Christ's Lordship.

5 Aug

**You Will Be An Upright
Community**

Acts 5:1-11

12 Aug

You Will Be Called To Lead

Acts 6:1-7

19 Aug

Young Adults Sunday

Hebrews 10:24-25

26 Aug

You Will Learn From The Past

Acts 7:1-53

You Will Be An Upright Community

Acts 5:1-11

Introduction

The church is to be an upright community and by our uprightness, we would be a witness to the world around us. The early chapters of Acts show how much impact an upright church can have. But churches are filled with sinful people who can and will fall and do what is wrong. If nothing is done, the witness of the church will be badly damaged. In Acts 5, God took the action but normally it is the church who need to take action. Do we? Are we an upright community? Why is it so important that we should be an upright community?

For Study and Discussion

I. The background to Ananias & Sapphira's action (Acts 4:31-37)

What was the situation in the Jerusalem's church at this time? Acts 4:32 tells us that the believers were "one in heart and mind" (Acts 4:32):

a. What was the general attitude of the congregation as far as their possessions were concerned? (Acts 2: 45; 4: 32)

i. What did some of those who had property do? How did Joseph live up to his new name - Barnabas (son of encouragement)? (Acts 2: 45; 4:32, 34-37)

ii. What were their attitudes and actions a result of (Acts 4:31)?

b. What were the apostles doing during this period? (Acts 2: 42-43; 4: 33)

c. As a result, what happened to the church? (Acts 2: 47; 4: 33b-34a)

2. So we now come to Ananias and Sapphira - the first recorded internal "problem" in the early church: They sold a property, like the others before them, and they put the money at the feet of the apostles. But they did something different from the others. What did they do differently? (Acts 5: 1-2)

3. Ananias and Sapphira sinned and died as a result.

a. What was their sin according to Acts 5:3-4?

b. What were the possible humanly motivations behind their actions?

i. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked about giving to impress others. What did He call such people? What would be their reward? (Mt 6:1-4)

ii. What did Paul say to Timothy about the results of the love of money? (1 Tim. 6:6-10)

c. At the spiritual root of their hypocrisy, what did Peter discern to be the true condition of their hearts (Acts 5:3)? How may we guard ourselves against this danger? Consider 1 John 3:8-10 and James 4:4-12.

4. What was the reaction of those who heard about the death of Ananias and Sapphira?

a. The church members (Acts 5:5, 11)

b. Those outside the church (Acts 5:13-16) - note the different reactions of different people.

c. What do you think Luke meant to show us by the reactions of these people?

Discipleship Pointers

By contrasting Acts 4:31 and Acts 5:3, Luke intends to show us the two ways to live, a life filled by the Spirit resulting in bold proclamation of God's word, or a heart filled with Satan leading to hypocrisy and lying lips. The consequence of the latter is illustrated by the likes of Judas Iscariot, Ananias and Sapphira did not live to enjoy the money and properties they schemingly kept for themselves. They are like the rich fool in Lk 12:20. The contrast is Peter and John in Acts 3:6, who having no silver or gold were mightily used by the Lord.

This judgment by God shows us God's estimate of those who accumulate wealth and status for themselves. They are not only spiritually depraved and in bondage to sin and Satan, having lost sight of God and eternity, their end will be death and destruction. This lesson is intended to change our perspective concerning life, so that we may live in the fear of God, rather than in bondage to the things of this world. The truth is: Christ reigns in His church and nothing shall escape His sight, including the innermost motivation of our hearts. On the day of His judgment, those with authentic faith alone will be saved. Those with pseudo faith, like Ananias and Sapphira, will be exposed and cut off from the assembly of His people.

Therefore, consider as a church, how are we doing in keeping ourselves as an upright community?

- Are we one in heart and mind or not?
- Are we a good witness to the world around us or not?
- By preaching the gospel to the world
- By been generous in providing for the needy. The Jerusalem church (not a wealthy church) provided for their own poor - so that there were no needy among them (Acts 4:34). As the early church got richer - they started providing for needy around them. Emperor Julian (the last Roman pagan emperor) wrote (in 360 AD) "It is disgraceful when no Jew is a beggar and the impious Galileans [Christians] support our poor in addition to their own;" "Would anybody say that of us today?"

• What is our attitude to the sins of Christians? Do we do anything about them?

Ananias and Sapphira would have been called hypocrites by Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns about these spiritual hypocrites (Mt 6:1-18) - whose pious & spiritual actions (giving, praying and fasting) were all governed by how others will see them.

- What would Jesus call us?
- Is there anything we need to do, as an individual or a church, to protect ourselves from the temptation to impress others by what we are doing?
- How may the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection guard and provide a refuge for us (2 Cor. 11:3-4)?

Family/Group Moments

Why do we pray? Why do we do good to others? Why do we fast? It is because we want others (parents, family, friends, etc) to see how good we are? If so, we are not doing right before God. Instead we should be doing good before God - even if no one see us - then God who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Mt 6:4)

You Will Be Called To Lead

Acts 6:1-7

Introduction

The early church's rapid growth led to growing pains as differences and problems plagued the church from its beginning. However, amid competing demands, its leaders recognised the priority of the word and prayer ministry. They saw that it was necessary for the church to have godly servant-leaders to look after its needs so that the mandate of preaching the gospel may be carried out unhindered. We will see in this study how the word of God continued to advance through the early church despite an internal conflict that arose because of how food was distributed.

For Study and Discussion

1) v1. What was the problem addressed in this passage?

a. If a spirit-filled church under the apostles' leadership can make such basic mistakes (letting widows starve), what kind of expectations should we have for the church today?

b. The disciples could have reacted against the apostles as leaders and behave in an unchristian way to challenge their leadership, but they did not. If leaders of our church today make mistake, how could we be loving and supportive of them, i.e. what would be some godly ways for us to respond?

2) a. What are the things that the apostles did right? vv2-4.?

b. What is the significance of the twelve being mentioned again by Luke in the light of Acts 6: 7 and Christ's commission to them in Acts 1:8?

3) Why did the apostles choose not to serve the widows themselves? How did the apostles' understanding of their role and mission amid competing demands influence their decisions? What were the apostle's priorities and concerns as reflected in their decisions?

a. Why did the apostles let the community select people so that the apostles can appoint them to address this problem?

b. Why didn't the apostles just hand-pick some leaders?

c. What were the qualifications set by the Apostles for the candidates elected to serve the tables? (You may want to look also at Exodus 18: 20-23.)

d. Why were these qualifications important?

e. Through the group, they discerned who amongst them will be leaders. How are we discerning in our church our leaders?

f. How is balance achieved in the life and leadership of the church to facilitate the spread of the gospel?

4) When you look at the list of leaders selected to lead this ministry, how many traditional Jewish names (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Daniel, etc.) do you see?

a. Given the absence of Hebraic names, what do you think was the ethnicity of the leaders the church selected?

b. In Acts 1-7, everyone is Jewish. But it was Grecian Jews chosen to feed Grecian widows. What can we learn about leadership from who was selected to address this problem?

c. Discuss why is the group pleased with the decision?

d. How can good leaders motivate us to do God's work in the world? What are the qualities of godly leaders in the light of the church mandate?

e. How is word growth measured in the church?

5. For Word growth to happen, what do you see are the responsibilities of:

a. The leaders

b. The members

And so how may we pray for the church?

Discipleship Pointers

- Acts 6:7 is an apt summary to the triumph of the Word regardless of setbacks. God continues to grow His church through the new apostolic leaders He has appointed over His people. Especially the priests, people most acquainted with the Scripture and the OT religion, are starting to be convicted that the church is the work of God.
- God would use adversities and conflicts to produce and develop leadership in His church. These leaders would be used by God to advance His plans for His church beyond their current roles. Consider therefore that you might be called to lead, biblical examples are full of leaders stepping up in times of conflicts within God's church.
- The characteristics of the chosen men are to be full of the Spirit and wisdom – they are chosen in order that the ministry of the word may not be neglected, and that the church of God may be cared for physically and spiritually.
- The congregation chose the leaders, when there is alignment amongst the members and the leaders to the right God given priorities, the right leaders were chosen. As a congregation, we should strive to seek that alignment to God's purpose for the church when choosing leaders through prayer.
- This is especially so when we read Acts 6:1-7 in the context of what just happened in Acts 5. The church faces internal and external threats all the time, as the evil one seeks to corrupt, intimidate, and destroy or derail her if possible.
- Hence, in the life of a church, setbacks and challenges are given. But the church can remain healthy and focused when its leaders and members work together to resolve problems while not losing sight of the high calling of the church to bear witness to the Gospel of God's grace.
- The high calling of the church requires that the people selected to lead and serve in whatever capacities, even those serving the tables, are people whose lives are attuned to God, yielded to the Lordship of Christ, so that the church will serve not some human agendas, but its God given purpose.

Family/Group Moments

- Have you been called to be a leader? Or do you seek to be one? Are you serving in any capacity in the church of God? Seek to live a Spirit filled life, filling your heart with the things of God and gain wisdom through His word. Pray for one another that this truth will take root in our lives and God will use you as servants of the Gospel.
- What are some challenges we are facing in our church today? How are conflicts addressed in our church? Do we come together seek resolution like the early church? What should we do differently (if any) in the light of what God has called the church to be?

Young Adult Sunday

Hebrews 10:24-25

Introduction

How would you try to encourage and sustain the love of your small group if some of them were insulted, persecuted, and even thrown in jail? This was essentially the scenario described in Hebrews 10:33-34. Some of the early believers were persecuted and jailed. It was a hostile environment. The rest of the group knew that if they identified with, or showed sympathy, for their fellow disciples, they all would be in big trouble. Where would you get the resources — the courage and grace to risk your life and possessions — to go encourage your brothers and sisters? This kind of love and encouragement is only possible if we have the kind of hope described in Hebrews 10:19-23 and follow the instructions of Hebrews 10:24-25 in our church and small group life.

For Study and Discussion

1) Describe your first experience attending a Bible study with other believers. Did it seem strange, awkward? Why did you go? Did you go back? Why or why not?

2) What were the recipients of the letter to the Hebrews instructed to do, in contrast to not meeting together? What were some circumstances described in Hebrews 10:26-39 that might cause them to stop meeting together? How did the approaching of the Day of the Lord become a source of their hope and strength (v.25)?

3) The word “consider” means to ponder, observe or study while the word “spur” means to stimulate, encourage, or motivate. Why should you “consider” someone before you “spur” the person on? How do you think the addition of these two words gives a more powerful effect compared to merely instructing the recipients to show love and do good deeds?

4) What do you think the words “good deeds” mean in this context? Read 1 Peter 2:12, Galatians 6:10, Titus 3:4-8, 3:14, Ephesians 2:8-10, James 1:27. Why do you think it is important for believers in Jesus Christ to demonstrate love and to do good deeds? What should be our main motivation for doing these things (Read Hebrews 10:19-23)?

5) What do you think is the difference between showing love and doing good deeds as an individual and as a group? Which do you think is more effective? Explain your answer. What practical steps can you take to show love and do good deeds together as a small group so as to live out the Gospel of His grace as a cross-shaped community?

6) When we encourage one another, what should we be reminding each other of (look back to vv. 19-25 to see what these early persecuted believers reminded themselves of through their gatherings)? Has there been a time in your life when someone else's encouragement protected you from turning away from God? How can you be there for someone else?

Discipleship Pointers

- Hebrews 10:25 exhorts believers to “not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing” because we are all in the habit of doing it. As these life-giving relationships are only found in community, Satan tries to “deceive” us into thinking we don't need to get together. He often uses our fears, insecurities and the distractions of our busy lives to lure us into living independently. Yet, a Christian life lived in isolation will always lack the spiritual health and vitality of a life lived in community.
- This gathering is also a confession and a reminder of the common hope that we share in Christ (vv. 23, 25), a hope not anchored to what this life can offer, but to Christ's work and the glories of the age to come, so that we may not be conformed to this world, but be renewed in our minds and our services, which our worship to God. Furthermore, apart from a strong community life, how can we live out Christ's commandment to us to love one another as He has loved us so that others can know His love too (John 13:34,35).

Therefore,

- Let us make it our aim to consider others — study them, know them, understand them — to the end that we can stimulate and motivate them on to love and good deeds.
- Let us be sure to do this by getting together often with other believers for the specific purpose of encouraging each other as a people of God formed and bound together by the Gospel.
- Let the heart of our encouragement to others be reminders of how great our hope is in Christ and that God can be trusted.

Family/Group Moments

- Who knows your hidden imperfections and is still committed to loving and encouraging you? Who, specifically, do you manifest God's grace, love and acceptance to?
- How is your small group fulfilling the purposes of Hebrews 10:24-25?

You Will Learn From The Past

Acts 7:1-53

Introduction

Stephen had been charged for speaking “blasphemous words against Moses and against God” and against the temple and the law. Those were extremely serious charges – as the Jews considered Moses their most important prophet, the Temple the sanctuary of God’s presence and the Law the holy revealed words of God. When given a chance to defend not just himself, but more so, the Gospel he was preaching, Stephen gave the longest recorded sermon in Acts. He spoke of God’s action and presence in the history of Israel and emphasized God’s sovereignty and grace. Stephen pointed his accusers to history to establish a link between the Jewish past and Jesus.

For Study and Discussion

1) Learning from the story of the Patriarchs

a) The God of glory choose to make Himself known to Abraham and made a covenant with Abraham. How was God present with Abraham when he did not possess even a foot of the promised land? (v2-7)

b) Share how was God present with Joseph in the story? (v9-19)

c) What do you think Steven was saying to the Jews in the answers to question a) and b) in the light of the Jews’ belief that God’s presence and glory are found in their temple, and the charges they brought against him in Acts 6:13-14?

d) List the similarities you can identify between what happened to Joseph and to Jesus. (v9-15)

2) Learning from the story of Moses.

Stephen retells the story of Moses to show how God was likewise present with Moses in Egypt and in the wilderness, but also to advance his argument further, by showing how Moses spoke about Jesus, the prophet to come (v. 37), and how Moses is a foreshadow of Jesus, so as to turn the table against them in v. 52 for rejecting Jesus as they had rejected Moses as their ruler and redeemer (v. 35).

a) How was God present with Moses?

b) How did the Israelites respond to Moses when he tried to act as their rescuer? (v:25-28) How did the people respond to Moses in the wilderness? (v:39-43)

c) Share the parallels you see between Jesus and Moses. (v20-43)

3) Learning from the account of the tabernacle-temple

a) What does vv. 39, 41 tell us about what happened to the hearts of the Israelites even though they had been delivered out of Egypt?

b) After tracing a brief history of the tabernacle-temple (v:44-47), what did Stephen imply was wrong with the Jews' attitude towards the temple (v48)? In what way is their zealousness over the temple likened to their forefathers' error in v. 41?

c) How do you think v2, 9-10, 30-34 and 44 support Stephen's argument regarding the temple?

4) The Counterstrike (v51-53)

a) List the accusations Stephen made against his accusers.

b) Share how you think Stephen had answered the accusations made against him in Acts 6:11, 13-14.

c) What do you think is the main point of Stephen's sermon?

d) In what ways may we fall into the same errors as Israel in the wilderness or the Jews of Stephen's time, and tempted to turn our hearts back towards "Egypt"? How should Stephen's sermon affect our worship and our lives? (Look up Isaiah 66:1,2. In his quotation of this verse, Stephen has replaced the last part of Isaiah 66:2 with Acts 7:51-53 to show his hearers how far they have fallen away from what God is looking for).

Discipleship Pointers

- Israel was God's chosen nation with many special privileges. Yet, their hearts were far from God and they even rejected the very One whom God had sent as Messiah and Saviour. In spite of having Moses, the temple and the law, the nation of Israel, like everyone else, is cut off from God apart from the Righteous One.
- All of us who have experienced God's salvation should know that it was in spite of, not because of, anything our hands had done. We need God's help to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. We need God to strengthen us with power through His Spirit so that Christ may dwell in our hearts.
- Only in Christ, and through Him alone, can anyone have a right and fruitful relationship with God.

Family/Group Moments

In what ways are we, like the Israelites in the wilderness, tempted to turn our hearts back towards "Egypt"? Do we have a tendency to revel in what our own hands had made?

Daily Prayer Guide

Sunday: The Church

Church members & families
Visitors
Pastor & church leaders
Sunday School teachers
Worship leaders
Small group leaders
Other churches
Outreach efforts

Monday: The Workplace

Supervisor
Co-workers
Subordinates
Customers & suppliers
Difficult situations
Work attitude
Work performance

Tuesday: Acquaintances

Mentors & mentorees
Accountability partners
Friends
Neighbours
Merchants
Public servants
Teachers & other school Workers
Children's friends & their families

Wednesday: My Country

Public officials - executive, legislative,
& judicial
Armed forces
Public morality
The media
The economy

Thursday: The World

International peace & understanding
Missions and missionaries
Persecuted churches
Hunger, sickness, & disaster relief

Friday: My Spiritual Growth

Maturity
Understanding
Faith
Love toward God
Love toward others
Servanthood

Saturday: My Family

Spouse
Children
Grandchildren
Parents
Brothers & sisters
Extended family
Unsaved loved ones

*"Call to me and I will answer you and
tell you great and unsearchable things
you do not know."-Jeremiah 33:3*

Little Steps To Great Learning!

Preparation:

- Attempt all questions in the relevant Bible study before your group meeting.
- Expect spiritual growth by thoughtfully working on the Bible study questions (and the suggested reading, if any) throughout the week.
- Seek the Holy Spirit's insight and guidance by praying daily in reflection of what you have learned through the Bible study.

Group Time:

- On the following Sunday, take notes during sermon to assist in focusing your thoughts.
- Be punctual for your group meeting.
- Share the insight gained through the sermon with your group.
- Be frank in sharing your response to the questions in the discipleship pointers.
- Encourage others by attesting to God's goodness and reality by sharing to the group (and others) how the Word has changed your thinking and action in response to your study in the past week.
- Using the front sheet, summarise how the lessons have helped you to understand God's revelation in the Bible through Jesus Christ, and your response to the revelation.

THE BIBLE is to be...

Read through...

Reflected in...

Lived out...

Given away...