

Rooted

in the soil of a
vibrant, growing faith

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Acts 4.1-12
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I. Connecting With One Another

The great 20th century theologian Karl Barth was once asked what was the greatest theological statement he'd ever heard. His response?

Jesus loves me, this I know,
for the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to Him belong,
they are weak but He is strong.

Why do you think he chose these words?

II. Introduction to this Study

Last week, Pastor Paul (rather brilliantly) helped us begin digging into a new series entitled "Rooted: In the Soil of a Vibrant, Growing Faith" (read more at gspc.org/rooted). As he mentioned, we are seeking to engage the central doctrines of the Protestant Reformation, known as the *solas* (meaning "only" in Latin). Put simply, those who (re)discovered these doctrines believed that they were the only things needed for a vibrant, growing Christian faith. If you missed either the study guide or message last week, click onto gspc.org/dig-deeper to engage the first topic, Scripture.

This week, we engage the person and work of Jesus, (re)discovering that he was not simply another spiritual teacher who encouraged us to be nicer to one another, that His teachings are not just another way for us to get ahead in life, and that His death and resurrection is not merely a great story. No, Jesus is God in human flesh, whose teachings are the very words of God, and He completes God's grand narrative, bringing the offer of salvation to the entire world!

III. Study the Text

- a. Read Acts 3 through 4.12 (or if you want to get the full context, begin in chapter 1!). What do you find interesting, challenging or confusing in these verses? Don't be shy: Share them with your group! (You never know who might have the same questions – or an answer!)
- b. In 3.1-10, we meet a man who is healed in the name of Jesus at the temple gate referred to as Beautiful. This gate separated the Court of Gentiles, where anyone was welcome, from the Court of Women, which was only for Jewish women. As such, this was one of busiest – if not the busiest – areas of the temple courts, which is most likely why he was brought to this place.

Why do you think Peter was willing to interact with this man, even being used by God (notice verses 11-16) to bring him healing? Do you think such miraculous healing can happen today? Why – or why not?

- c. Reread Acts 3.17-26. How many times does Peter use the word "prophet" in your translation? (some versions have as many as six times!)

Why do you think Peter uses a miraculous healing in the name of Jesus to engage the writings of Hebrew prophets to people who certainly knew all about these prophets? In other words, what dots is he trying to connect for them?

- d. At the outset of chapter 4 we read that the captain of the temple, priests and Sadducees jailed Peter and John for the evening. Why do you think they did so? What was so intimidating about their message? What happens in the midst of their imprisonment? Why? (see verse 4 for a hint)
It's been said, "the seed of the church is the blood of martyrs." That is, when Christians suffer, far from it hurting the Kingdom of God, people are converted! Why do you think that is the case?
- e. The Sadducees – one of the four main political/religious groups of the day (the other three were Pharisees, Essenes, and Zealots) – wanted desperately to get rid of Peter and John. One of the distinguishing marks of their theological perspective was a disbelief in the resurrection, which is why they were sad, you see (Get it? *Sad, you see* – sorry, seminary joke!). How does this help explain why they were "greatly disturbed" at the teaching of these "unschooled, ordinary men"?
- f. Notice, again, Acts 4.7. Why do you think the rulers, elders and teachers of the law didn't just deny that the miraculous healing happened? (Read verses 13-22 to see how they discuss it!)
- g. Acts 4.9-10 is one of the most beautiful run-on sentences in the history of the world, don't you think? Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, reminds us – the readers – of the context, of why they were in trouble: because they had shown an act of kindness! Peter and John had gotten themselves in this hot water because they were acting like Jesus! And because they showed concern for someone in need, they received the opportunity to share their faith.
- h. In verse 11, Peter quotes Psalm 118.22 as a prophecy that has been fulfilled in Jesus' death and resurrection. Then, in verse 12, he boldly declares that through this Jesus we can experience God's salvation.

In our day and age, claims like Peter's are rejected as exclusivist and intolerant. Do you think that is how Peter meant it to be heard? Do you think that is how it was heard by those of his day?

If you're studying this after hearing the message, what do you think about what Curtis said about the exclusivist/inclusivist nature of the gospel?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. What things do you need to be healed of in the name of Jesus? Are there family members or friends who need to be healed in the name of Jesus?
- b. What does it mean for you that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures? How does that help you rest in the completion of God's story of salvation?
- c. Have you heard about or experienced Christian suffering leading to evangelization and conversion?
- d. In what ways do you find yourself, like Peter and John, engaging with others who are in need in some way? How do you care for them in the name of Jesus? How has doing so allowed you to share the good news of God's salvation in Jesus?

V. Spend some time in prayer:

- a. Lift up our ongoing denominational discernment process, that we would treat one another with respect and be led by God's Spirit;
- b. Pray for our pastors, staff, elders and deacons to be grounded in the Scriptures, God's written Word, and upon Jesus, God's living Word,
- c. Ask God to lead and guide our children, students, families, and adults, that we would all be and become disciples of Jesus who connect with God, grow in faith and serve in love,
- d. Pray for our current sermon series, that it would help us (re)discover our roots, so that our lives would reveal a vibrant, growing faith in Jesus!