

Monday

Week 45

Ministry of the Early Church

Bible Reading: Acts 3:1-10

Q 177 How was the lame man at the gate healed?

A. The lame man was healed in the name of Jesus.

A young evangelist was preaching in a country church in Kansas. He heard that a lady in the church had cancer. He became very concerned. As he prayed, he felt that he needed to go to pray for the lady. He asked the pastor of the church to go with him. They went to the lady's house. The evangelist prayed earnestly that the Lord would heal the woman. He prayed in the name of Jesus. It was not long after that the lady was well. She lived for many years after she was healed. She often thanked the Lord for healing her.

Peter and John saw the lame man at the gate of the temple. They told the man to rise up and walk in the name of Jesus. The lame man was healed. The man was so happy that he shouted and leaped as he praised the Lord.

Thinking Deeper

Rip Engle had been the head football coach at Penn State University for years. When he retired, the coach that followed him was a slight young man who had been quarterback for Brown University and then part of the Penn State staff. There were questions about the new coach. Could he motivate the players? Did he have a good philosophy for winning? Would he be as good as Rip Engle? Would he be able to recruit star players? Those questions have been more than answered. The year 2008 was the coach's forty-third season and as of then he had won 75% of his games. He learned well from old coach Engle and proved he was ready to coach.

Jesus had taught his disciples to minister to people. They had seen Jesus' ministry for three years. But Jesus had ascended to heaven leaving them to continue the ministry. Jesus told them His Spirit would be with them and fill them. When Peter and John saw the man at the gate, they did what Jesus would have done had he been there. They reached out and touched him in the name of Jesus. The man was healed! Because they had been prepared and empowered, they were able to continue the ministry of Jesus. He is still with the church today, and we are to continue the ministry to needy people.

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Ministry of the Early Church

Bible Reading: Acts 4:1-22

Q 178 What did the leaders tell Peter and John after the lame man was healed?

A. The leaders told Peter and John to stop preaching in the name of Jesus.

A boy in elementary school liked to read his Bible during breaks. His teacher saw him and told him he was not allowed to read it. She said he was doing something against the law. The boy told his mother that his teacher wouldn't let him read his Bible. The boy's mother told her pastor. The pastor visited the school superintendent. He told him that it was legal for the boy to read his Bible if it was free time. The superintendent realized that in a free country the boy should be able to read the Bible on his free time. So the boy was allowed to take his Bible to school.

Ever since the days of the disciples, people have tried to keep Christians quiet about their faith. When Peter was told to keep quiet about Jesus, he realized that he still needed to tell the truth. "We ought to obey God rather than men," he said. Christians should tell others about Jesus.

Thinking Deeper

A Christian veterinarian at a major American university used his contacts with farmers to drop a word here and there about his faith in Jesus Christ. Periodically a farmer would not appreciate the witness. One complained to the department head who came to the laboratory with a letter. The letter stated that he, the veterinarian, would not speak about his faith while he was on the job at the university. The pressure was put on the Christian to sign the paper. He objected. "I have a Constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech," said the Christian. "I will not sign the paper." The department head took the letter with him, unsigned, and the veterinarian continued to witness as the doors opened. That Christian knew about and was inspired by Peter's run-in with the religious leaders who tried to suppress his witness for Jesus.

Peter and John were bold in calling on the name of Jesus as they ministered to people in need. They knew that the only truth that would help people was in Jesus, for "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

Bible Reading: Acts 5:1-14

Q 179 Why did Ananias and Sapphira die?

A. Ananias and Sapphira died because they lied to the Holy Ghost.

A great king made a speech before a crowd of his subjects. When he was finished speaking, the people shouted, "The voice of a god, not a man! The voice of a god, not a man!" The king was proud. He kept listening to the people give him glory. He liked the attention. Suddenly something awful happened. He felt like he was being eaten alive. Worms were all through his body. This story is in the Bible and it's about a king named Herod. The Bible says that the angel of the Lord struck him. Herod died because of his pride and because he didn't give God the glory.

Ananias and Sapphira died because they lied. Peter said they lied to the Holy Spirit. Each of them fell dead right after they lied. Don't ever lie to God. He is the God of truth.

Thinking Deeper

It is the exception that God smites people immediately on their violations of His truth. A man was brought before Moses because he desecrated the Sabbath for gathering sticks. He was put to death. How many others have since gathered sticks on the Sabbath without immediately dying? Korah rebelled against God's authority and the earth swallowed him and his fellow rebels. How many rebels have since publically railed against God's authority (e.g. bumper stickers popular on college campuses "Question Authority") and have not been swallowed up by the earth? Uzzah put his hand out to steady the Ark of the Covenant and he was stricken down. How many others have put their hands on God's anointed without immediate consequence? Ananias and Sapphira lied to Peter and were immediately stricken dead. How many others have told lies to make themselves look good in public and have seemingly benefited?

"Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small," wrote Longfellow. God has not abandoned justice or judgment. Swift retribution in the past may have been God's way of showing the importance He places on His judgments. Because in His mercy He delays His reckoning does not mean that His justice sleeps. It is important to live in accordance, not contrary to, His ways.

Bible Reading: Acts 6:8-15; 7:1-2, 51-60

Q 180 Why was Stephen stoned to death?

A. Stephen was stoned to death because he preached that the people had crucified Jesus.

A group of 30 children in China were in their Sunday School Class. Suddenly, a van stopped in front of the building and officers came into the class. They took the children to the police station and told them they must write “I do not believe in Jesus” one hundred times. If they refused, they would not let them go. But the children wrote “I believe in Jesus today. I will believe in Jesus tomorrow. I will believe in Jesus forever.” The officers didn’t know what to do. These children would not deny Jesus, even if it meant staying in jail. Soon the children were allowed to go home.* These children stood for Jesus even when it was dangerous.

Stephen stood for Jesus when he was arrested. The people did not want to hear about Jesus. When Stephen told them that they crucified Jesus because of their evil hearts, they became so angry that they stoned him. We may face people who do not want to hear about Jesus and salvation. God will help us be strong as we stand for Jesus.

**Reported by Open Doors in www.saworship.com/article-page.php?Page=family.php&ID=2248*

Thinking Deeper

In October 2008, Christian worker Gayle Williams was killed by the Taliban in Kabul, Afghanistan. She had been working with SERVE, a ministry to the disadvantaged. On the morning she was killed, an eyewitness said, “They raced up the street and stopped in front of the lady. They took out a gun and shot her on the spot. Then they rode off.” A Taliban spokesman gave the reason she was killed: “Because she was working for an organization which was preaching Christianity in Afghanistan’, adding: ‘Our (leaders) issued a decree to kill this woman,’ he said. ‘This morning our people killed her in Kabul.’”*

Gayle Williams joined a distinguished line of martyrs who have been strong in their faith. Standing in that line are people like John Hus, William Tyndale, Origen, St. Paul, and Stephen, along with numerous others who stood for Christ even unto death.

Those who violently try to squelch the truth make a mistake. “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church,” wrote Tertullian. God takes evil and turns it to good. He takes extreme evil and turns it to good, as in Jesus’ death at the hands of evil people. Take heart during persecution. Jesus is Lord of all!

**Reported by MailOnline, October 21, 2008.*

Review the Week's Questions

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Q 178 What did the leaders tell Peter and John after the lame man was healed?

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Q 179 Why did Ananias and Sapphira die?

A. Ananias and Sapphira died because they lied to the Holy Ghost.

Q 180 Why was Stephen stoned to death?

A. Stephen was stoned to death because he preached that the people had crucified Jesus.

A boy was asked what "faith" meant. He answered, "Faith is believing what you know ain't so." That boy was wrong about faith. Faith is believing in things that are true even when you can't see them. Peter and John had faith and they told the lame man to walk. He walked. The leaders told Peter to stop preaching in Jesus' name. Peter kept preaching because he knew that Jesus was real. Ananias and Sapphira had the wrong kind of faith. They thought they could lie and get away with it, but they didn't. Stephen had the right kind of faith. He told the truth even when it cost him his life. Real faith is in things that are real, even when you don't see them.

You can believe in Jesus even though you haven't seen him. Many people have found out that Jesus is very real. He saves sinful people, and he helps Christians to be strong believers. He will help your faith.

Thinking Deeper

There is a story about a liberal theologian who did not believe the Christian creeds. Yet he would go to church services and join in with the singing. It was during the speaking of the creeds that he refused to join in. What was the difference? In his mind, singing words somehow insulated him from their meanings. Or maybe, since he sang them he felt he really didn't mean them. He may not be the only one who takes a compartmentalized view of proclamation. Another liberal preacher felt like he spoke the word of God when he preached, but when he left the pulpit there was nothing to it. No wonder children get the idea that faith is "believing what you know ain't so."

The account of the early church is filled with the reality of faith that is truly alive. Things happened. People were changed. The enemy was stirred up. Persecution came to the church. But in it all they were triumphant in faith. Stephen showed it well. From his shining face to his final words ("Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."), he showed that faith alive is faith victorious. Keep the faith. It is real.