

# Divine Appointments

May 7 – Acts 3:1-4:4

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Day 127 – 238 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

Peter and John visited the Temple and performed a great miracle which led to an opportunity to share Christ with a crowd. However, though their actions and words were received by most, the priests (Sadducees) were not amused. By the end of the day, Peter and John were thrown in jail.

The context for this story is *Acts 1:8* and *Matthew 28:19, 20*. Peter, John, and the other followers of Christ have received and been empowered by the Holy Spirit (*Acts 2*). They were still very excited from the upper room event and the 3000 people who responded to the gospel. Thus, they continued to be witnesses of Jesus in Jerusalem (*Acts 1:8*), making disciples as they went (*Matt. 28:19*).

I love the fact that Peter and John were not planning an outreach event or mission trip. Rather they were simply going about their daily routine of praying in the Temple, doing what they knew to do. The Lord took care of the rest. **He arranged a divine appointment** with the lame man at the gate. However, Peter and John were prepared to minister to this man. **Simply put, they seized opportunities as they presented themselves.** They shared Christ as they were going, a fulfillment of the Great Commission.

By being obedient to minister to one person, the Lord opened the door to reach thousands. After seeing the crowd who came to watch the lame man “walking and leaping and praising God” (v.8), Peter again took the opportunity to share the gospel (v.12-26). The result was amazing.

However, the story ended with Peter and John getting arrested, which introduced a common theme in the book of *Acts*. Satan hates the gospel and, therefore, will do whatever is necessary to stop it. When God’s people are obedient to the Great Commission, they must expect a great opposition.

## Daily Reflection

While planning outreach events and mission trips are excellent ways to help spread the gospel, we must not overlook the opportunities that are all around us. The most effective ministry plan includes individual believers (that’s us) obeying the Great Commission and **taking advantage of daily divine appointments.**

There are hurting people everywhere, some of which we will encounter any given day. They simply need a word of encouragement, hope, prayer, or the good news of salvation. **The problem is that we are so busy with our lives that we neglect to see “the lame man at the gate.”** Notice that Peter and John “fixed their gaze on him” (v.4). They did not walk by without saying or doing something.

Think about your average day or week. Who are the people you will see? How could you prepare yourself for those divine appointments?

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Be assured that the enemy wants to distract and discourage you, keep you from ministering to anyone in Jesus’ name. How does he do it?

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**The Lord has someone in the crowd that He has divinely appointed for you to meet, but are you paying attention?** Are you prepared? Don’t let the opposition keep you from your commission.

# Filled with the Spirit

May 8 – Acts 4:5-31

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## Today in Your Reading

After being arrested (v.3), Peter and John were questioned and released by the Sanhedrin. Healing the lame man at the gate of the Temple caused quite a stir in Jerusalem, and the rulers, elders, and chief priests investigated these men to ascertain its source. Their arrest gave Peter and John an opportunity to share the gospel with these Jewish leaders.

Peter, the one who denied that he knew Jesus three times, spoke to these important men about Jesus with boldness and confidence. What changed? **He was “filled with the Holy Spirit”** (v.8). Remember, Jesus taught them that when they stood before rulers, they were not to worry about what to say, for the Holy Spirit would give them the words (*Lk. 12:11, 12*). The religious leaders even noted something different about Peter. They “recognized him as having been with Jesus” (v.13). Could that be said of us?

Despite having no training or education, this fisherman was able to speak boldly about the Lord because of His time with Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit (v.13). Though they were warned by the Jewish leaders to say no more, Peter and John told them that they “could not stop speaking about Jesus” (v.20). Again, could this be said of us?

Were Peter and John disobeying their rulers? It appears so. But aren't we supposed to obey our rulers and always submit to their will? Yes, we are to obey our leaders (*Rom. 13:1-7*), but our first obligation is to obey God. Our rulers are sinners too, and sometimes they make decisions that conflict with God's will and ways. When that happens, our first allegiance is to God, then to man (v.19). Peter and John were being obedient to Christ's great commission, even though that meant conflicting with the order of their authorities. While they were guilty of “breaking the law” of man, they were innocent in the eyes of God.

## Daily Reflection

It is not education, experience, or training that qualifies us to share the good news about Jesus with others. We are eligible to tell others simply because of what we have seen Him do in our own lives, what He has taught us from His Word, and that He has empowered us to share. Every follower of Christ is eligible to be a voice to others about Him.

The phrase that stood out to me today was **“filled with the Holy Spirit.”** Peter was filled with the Spirit, and the result was boldness and confidence (v.8). Other followers were also “filled with the Spirit and spoke the word of God in boldness” (v.13). There seems to be a difference between being indwelt by the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit.

Every follower of Christ is indwelt with the Spirit at salvation (*Jn. 14:16; Gal. 3:2; Eph. 1:13*). However, not every believer is filled with the Spirit. What's the difference?

Paul compared being filled with the Spirit to being drunk with wine (*Eph. 5:18*). When we are drunk, we are allowing the wine to possess and influence our mind and body. **When we are filled with the Spirit, we are allowing Him to possess and influence our mind and body.** It's like a car battery. Every car has a battery, but the battery is not engaged until the ignition sequence is executed. When the key is placed and turned in the ignition, then the power of the battery is employed, and the car begins to run.

As Christians, we have the Spirit within us, but He is not always engaged because of our sin. In fact, we can grieve and squelch the Spirit (*Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19*). That's why it's important to confess and repent of our sin and be obedient to the Lord's leading. **When we completely yield ourselves to Him, we will be filled with the Spirit.** Are you yielding yourself completely to Him? Are you grieving Him or engaging Him?

# Unity and Charity

May 9 – Acts 4:32-5:16

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## Today in Your Reading

The followers of Christ continued to grow in number as they obeyed the Lord’s commands and modeled lives surrendered to the gospel (5:14). The setting was Jerusalem, a partial fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy in Acts 1:8. The disciples were leading the way, “giving testimony of the resurrection of Jesus with great power, and grace was upon them all” (v.33).

Luke first described this large group of Christ-followers as “the congregation of those who believed” (4:32). He later referred to them as the church (5:11), which is the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means the “called out ones.” Today, we use the word *church* to refer to a gathering of believers in a particular location (local church), but it could also refer to all believers everywhere (universal church).

In this first local church (Jerusalem), we see demonstrated the characteristics that Christ communicated in the upper room. That night, Jesus prayed that His followers would “all be one, perfected in **unity**” (Jn. 17:11, 21, 22). Here in Acts the church is described as having “one heart and soul” (4:32) and being “in one accord” (5:12). Jesus also gave His disciples a new commandment that night, that they would **love** one another (Jn. 13:34, 35). Again, in Acts, we observe an outpouring of great love, to the extent that “there was not a needy person among them” (4:34).

**Unity and charity — these were the marks of the early church.** Believers were one in Christ, having one faith, one Spirit, one baptism, and one mission (Eph. 4:1-5). The unity of these believers was also encouraged by their charity. The word *charity* means love for and good will towards others. That love and good will prompts generosity, particularly looking for ways to meet the needs of others, even if that required personal sacrifice.

For example, believers were selling their property and voluntarily giving the proceeds to the disciples to distribute to the poor (v.34-37). Surely, they had in mind Jesus’ words, “To the extent that you do unto the least of these, you do it unto Me” (Matt. 25:40).

However, though unity and charity are to be marks of the church, Satan tried to spoil both. He tempted Ananias and Sapphira, pretenders who lied to the disciples (and to God) about their donation. They were hoping to get praised for their charity, when in truth they were being deceitful. Their dishonesty would’ve caused conflict in the church, but Peter confronted them, and the Lord acted (Jn. 20:23). Satan’s plot was foiled, and unity was strengthened.

## Daily Reflection

**Would you say that your church is marked by unity and charity? Are most Christians today concerned about unity and charity?** If not, what preoccupies their thoughts and efforts?

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What about you? **Do you promote or prohibit unity?** Do you sacrificially give to the church? If not, why not? **What prevents your charity?**

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# A Higher Calling

May 10 – Acts 5:17-42

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## Today in Your Reading

Peter, John, and the others had a run-in with the chief priests (Sadducees). They were teaching in the Temple, and the Jewish leaders became jealous of the attention they were getting (v.17). In the minds of the Sadducees, any attention validated the ministry of Jesus as the Messiah, which meant that they were wrong to crucify Him. They could not endure that thought. Therefore, they sought to squelch this movement as quickly as possible.

Since Jesus' ascension, His eleven disciples (twelve after Matthias was added) had been given a new name — Apostles (1:26). While Jesus was on earth, He was their teacher (rabbi), and they were His students (disciples). However, at His ascension, Jesus assigned them a great commission. He sent them out to make disciples. Thus, they were now called Apostles, those who are sent as messengers, envoys, or representatives, with a specific duty.

While all the Apostles were disciples, not all disciples or followers of Jesus were Apostles. The Apostles were men who had been with Jesus during His ministry. They had observed His miracles and heard His teaching. They were also eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection. Thus, while there are numerous disciples (followers), there are just a few Apostles.

Why is this distinction important to our story today? **The Apostles had a high calling**, to represent the Lord Jesus well, by obeying their orders and fulfilling their great commission. Knowing their calling, they understood that the enemy would try to distract or discourage them. But nothing would stand in their way or keep them from their duty, even their earthly rulers.

So then, when Peter and John were threatened by the religious leaders, they did not cease sharing about Jesus (Acts 4:1-24). When they were jailed, they escaped and returned to the

Temple to teach (5:17-25). Even getting flogged didn't stop the Apostles (v.40). In fact, they "rejoiced that they had been considered worthy to suffer for Jesus' sake" (v.41), and "they continued teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (v.42).

## Daily Reflection

The key verse in today's story was Acts 5:29, which says, "But Peter and the Apostles answered (the Sadducees), 'We must obey God rather than men.'" It is true that our civil and religious leaders wield just authority, and we should be submissive to them. However, our allegiance to them cannot supersede our allegiance to God. Simply put, we have a higher calling to obey God and fulfill our commission.

Think of it this way. When the owner of the company gives you a task to complete, you do your best not to fail him. You don't let difficulty, distractions, co-workers, or even your manager slow you down. Because you have an assignment from the guy at the top, you cannot allow anyone or anything below to impede your progress. **You have a higher calling.**

How do you treat your great commission — to make disciples? Do you allow people and problems distract, discourage, or derail you? Or have you persevered despite the opposition?

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**Don't allow your higher calling to be distracted, discouraged, or derailed by a lower conflict.**

# Godly Servant-Leaders

May 11 – Acts 6:1-7

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Day 131 – 234 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

The Apostles addressed an issue related to a group of widows who were being neglected. The issue was handled beautifully. In fact, their solution established some important precedents.

The setting was Jerusalem. The early church was growing rapidly, but a complaint arose among a group of widows that was being neglected in the serving of food (v.1). To solve the problem, the Apostles asked the congregation to select seven godly men to whom they could delegate this task (v.2, 3). The people agreed that this was a good solution and quickly chose seven men (v.5).

While the Apostles were serving the people, they found their ministry opportunities hindered by the amount of time it took to prepare and deliver food. In other words, the ministry of prayer and teaching was deterred (v.2). Though “feeding the sheep” required physical food, it also required spiritual nourishment, which they felt specially called to perform. The seven chosen men would be put in charge of serving tables, which allowed the Apostles to fulfill their calling. Thus, the people’s needs were met, and the gospel continued to spread (v.7).

Let’s consider the precedents established here.

First, **God established two offices for the good of the church — elders and deacons** (*Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3*) — **shepherds and servant-leaders**. The origin or genesis of these two offices is found in this story. While the terms *elders* and *deacons* are not used, the roles are generally described. In fact, the Greek word for *serve* tables is *diakoneo*, from which we get the word *deacon*; and two responsibilities of elders or pastors are prayer and teaching (ministry of the Word). Thus, **the biblical deacon is a servant-leader who assists the elders or pastors in meeting the needs of the church body**. We will study the role of the elders later in the New Testament.

**These two offices — elders and deacons — were meant to complement each other, not conflict with each other**. When they both fulfill their respective roles, then the church benefits. They work together for the good of the gospel.

Second, notice that the chosen applicants (deacons) were required to be men of character. They were to have a good reputation and to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. They were men that the people knew to have integrity. They were trustworthy and responsible; and they were men of compassion, as they would be caring for the poor and widows.

Third, these men (deacons) were not appointed by the Apostles. Rather they were selected from among the people (v.3). While the Apostles spiritually led the church, the believers had a responsibility too. They took ownership of their own care (self-government) and selected men they knew and trusted.

Fourth, after these men (deacons) were selected, the Apostles and people laid their hands on them and prayed for them (v.6). Here is where we get the concept of ordaining or commissioning men for service. This act sets them apart for a special purpose.

## Daily Reflection

Without these men (deacons) fulfilling their ministry role, the spread of the gospel would’ve been distracted, delayed, divided, or derailed. Thus, deacons serve a very important role in the local church. It is incumbent on every believer to be looking for men of character who can serve in this capacity. It is our responsibility to commission them, to support them, and to keep them accountable to their calling.

**How appropriate for the church to have an office that reflects the humble servant-leadership of our Savior**. Do you know your deacons? You should. Pray for them and thank God for them.

# Stand Up for Jesus

May 12 – Acts 6:8-8:1a

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Day 132 – 233 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

Stephen, one of the seven men chosen to assist the Apostles, was killed. Thus, Stephen was the first martyr for Jesus after the resurrection. When Jesus told His followers at His ascension, “You will be My witnesses,” the word He used for *witnesses* was *martyrs*. Therefore, Stephen was another fulfillment of *Acts 1:8*.

What happened in our story today set a precedent for the rest of *Acts*. As Christ’s followers were obedient to His great commission and shared the gospel with those who would listen, Satan opposed them at every step. For centuries, he had lulled the Jews to sleep with their mundane rituals and routines. They were steeped in their laws and traditions. While they honored God with their lips, their hearts were far from Him. Satan desired to keep it that way, and the last thing he wanted was Christians changing Jews’ hearts and minds.

Therefore, persecution is a theme repeated throughout the book of *Acts*. While persecution may take on different forms (i.e., arguing, threats, arrest, beating, prison, or death), they all have the same goal — discouragement. To defeat the spread of the gospel, our enemy attempts to discourage us from talking about Jesus. Stephen happened to be the first example. However, he won’t be the last.

Notice that the enemies of the gospel cannot oppose the truth with reasoning or sound arguments. Neither could those who opposed Stephen “cope with the wisdom and the Spirit (grace and power) with which he was speaking” (v.8, 10). Thus, Christ’s enemies must resort to lies, false testimony, bullying, and physical harm. Even when Stephen spoke to the Sanhedrin, members of the Council did not try to reason with him. Instead, they covered their ears, rushed at him in anger, and sought to kill him (v.57, 58).

The same is true in our “cancel culture” today. Those who live a lie hate to be exposed to the truth. The only response they have is anger, lies, name-calling, bullying, threats, and physical harm. Thus, our enemy still uses these tactics to discourage and silence God’s people.

There were two details in this story that we must not overlook. First, we were introduced to Saul, who would later become the Apostle Paul (v.58; 8:1a). However, at this time, he was working with the enemy to discourage followers of Christ. He may have even been in charge.

Second, **Stephen said that he saw Jesus in heaven “standing at the right hand of God”** (v.55). After His ascension, Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Father (*Matt. 22:44; Acts 2:33*), but here He was standing. While we don’t know for certain why Jesus was standing, it may have been as a witness on Stephen’s behalf. Jesus said, “Everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I will acknowledge him before My Father in heaven...” (*Matt. 10:32, 33*). **When His people stand up for Him, He stands up for them.**

## Daily Reflection

Have you ever faced persecution for your faith? Typically, when we face persecution, we think something is wrong. But Jesus said that it would occur because they first persecuted Him. If we are being persecuted, it’s not because we are doing something wrong. It’s probably because we are doing something right, and the enemy wants to stop it. We must not let him win.

Though Stephen was attacked, he sensed the peace of Christ. Furthermore, as Jesus promised, the Spirit gave Stephen the words to say when he stood before the rulers, not to mention the opportunity to point them to Christ. **Other than Jesus, there is no one our enemy despises more than His followers (the Church) and their willingness to stand up for Him. Will you stand up for Jesus no matter what?**

# No Boundaries

May 13 – Acts 8:1b-40

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Day 133 – 232 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

Philip, one of the seven men (deacons) chosen to serve the widows in Jerusalem, preached the word about Jesus in Judea and Samaria. God blessed his efforts, and people everywhere were believing in Christ for salvation. The Lord was growing His Church.

If Philip was chosen to serve in Jerusalem, then why was he preaching in Samaria? Enemies of Christ began persecuting His followers (under the leadership of Saul, v.3), which forced them to scatter throughout the region. Thus, another part of Jesus' prophecy in *Acts 1:8* was being fulfilled. His followers, who began in Jerusalem, were now witnesses in Judea and Samaria.

Samaria was a region that Jews despised. The city of Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel (after the nation split). When the people of Israel rebelled against God, He gave them over to the Assyrians. As part of their conquest, the Assyrians scattered the Jews throughout their empire and imported Gentiles to live in Israel. The result was a mixed group of Jews and Gentiles. Thus, pure Jews despised Samaritans and would not travel through their land. However, **Jesus ignored this practice and shared the good news of salvation with them.**

Likewise, Philip preached in Samaria and people believed in Jesus. When the Apostles heard that Samaritans were being saved and baptized, Peter and John came to pray for and lay hands on them, "that they might receive the Holy Spirit" (v.15). Why did they not receive the Spirit immediately after salvation, as we do? Since these people were Samaritans, there may have been some skepticism about their conversion, and the Jewish Christians may have been suspicious about accepting them into the Church. With Peter and John's affirmation and approval, they removed all doubt and distrust. **Samaritans and Jews were now reunited in Christ. Together, they found salvation in Him.**

While Peter and John affirmed the conversion of most Samaritans, they did not affirm them all. There was a man named Simon the magician who, although he had professed belief, was only interested in the effects of salvation (power), not the cause (Christ). Peter condemned Simon for "his heart was not right before God" (v.21). This is a good reminder that while someone may profess faith in Christ (say the words), they may not possess it because of their unbelief. The evidence of Simon's false conversion was the lack of true repentance and godly fruit.

## Daily Reflection

After his time in Samaria, the Lord sent Philip to speak to an Ethiopian on the road (v.26-39). Philip shared Christ through discussing *Isaiah 53*, and the Ethiopian believed and was baptized. The Gospel had now reached Africa!

We should walk away from this passage with at least two truths. First, **God uses persecution for His good — the spread of the gospel** (v.4). Those who flee from harm take the good news with them, and more people hear about Christ. While the enemy intends to squelch the gospel, he cannot thwart God's plans and purposes.

Second, the gospel is for all people — men, women, Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans, and Ethiopians. **The Church of Christ has no boundaries! Those things which divide the people of the world** — borders, nationalities, languages, ethnicities, skin color, gender, and more — **are not obstacles for the gospel.** All people need salvation. Therefore, all people need Christ; and, because of Christ, all people can find unity in Him.

What man-made "boundaries" exist in your world? **While they might seem impossible to overcome, they cannot stop the saving power of the gospel.** Pray that God might use you to cross these boundaries and share the love of Christ with someone who needs it.