**Transformed: A Survey of the Book of Acts**

**Week 4 (January 30, 2019)**

**Helpful Background**

1. Earlier in chapter 4, Peter gave a passionate defense of the miracle that he and John had done in the name of Jesus. He then challenged the high council, demonstrating no fear and clearly being led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. He and John refused to stop acting and/or teaching the name of Jesus. When the high council could not agree what course of action to follow, they released John and Peter with a strong warning. The apostles promptly ignored the warning, and went on preaching and teaching about Jesus

2. This brief brush with persecution experienced by the leaders of the Church served as a call to prayer for the believers. The followers of Jesus gathered, prayed scripture back to God, and applied it to their troubling circumstances. They did this as an exercise of trust in God, and to remind themselves and others that God was in control.

3. Sometimes when we find ourselves in circumstances that cause fear or anxiety, we pray that God would deliver us from those tough times. We pray that God would take away the trial, take us away from the trouble, or calm the storm. The believers in the early Church, as led by the Holy Spirit, prayed that God would give them boldness to make the most of the opportunities that the rough circumstances would provide. They did not pray to be delivered or freed from the trials. They asked God to provide boldness so that they could preach and teach about Jesus. The believers prayed that God would then provide miracles as confirmation.

4. The Holy Spirit once again filled, renewed, recharged, and refreshed the believers after their powerful prayer time. (4:23-31) God grants every believer in Jesus Christ with the gift of the Holy Spirit, but at times, the presence of the Spirit is strengthened by a Divine act of grace. The believers in this situation needed to have courage, boldness, strength, and be able to preach and share the good news about Jesus in the face of persecution, so God granted them all a renewal of the Spirit already present in them.

5. In the early Church in Jerusalem, the believers provided for each other. They served as family for one another. When Jews converted to following Jesus, they experienced rejection from many in their lives, and at times, would have been considered to be dead by their loved ones. The strong community of faith would have been necessary in many ways as not only an emotional “safe harbor,” but as a place of strength for all other aspects of life.

6. By working together to deal with ongoing rejection, pressure from the religious establishment, and ongoing persecution, the Church actually got stronger. The sense of community deepened, they were “united in heart and mind,” and they helped each other without restraint or concern. They trusted each other, they cared deeply for each other, and they valued each other and their community more than their individual privileges or possessions.

7. The man nicknamed Barnabas played a huge role in the early Church and the expansion of the gospel beyond Jerusalem. But when he was first mentioned in scripture, he was Joseph, a follower of Jesus who is part of a close community of believers in Jerusalem. Joseph had been transformed by his faith in Jesus, and was part of the believers living in community. He no longer considered what he owned to be his own, so he was willing to sell it to help others. He sold a field, and gave the money to the apostles. We don’t know if this action had a part in Joe getting a cool nickname, but it may have been a factor.

**Review Questions**

8. (4:23-24) What happened before 4:23 that sparked their prayers? Why did the believers pray? How did they begin their prayer?

9. (4:25-26) Why did they pray from Psalm 2? Why would this psalm have been familiar to them? Why is their prayer significant?

10. (4:27-28) How did they apply the Psalm to their situation in their prayer? Why is this both powerful and dangerous? How specific did they get? From where did they get their confidence? In who/what did they trust?

11. (4:29-31) For what did they ask in their prayer? Why is this both surprising and significant? What happened? How did God respond?

12. (4:31) For what did they ask in their prayer? Why is this both surprising and significant? What happened? How did God respond?

13. (4:32) How is the Church described? How were they “united” and what difference did this make? What may have contributed to this unity? What benefit would there be in such a community?

 14. (4:33-35) To what did the apostles testify? What difference did this make? What evidence is given for the love/unity demonstrated by the believers? Why were the apostles given the donations to distribute?

15. (4:36-37) Who was Joseph? Why is his background important/included? What had he been nicknamed, and who gave him this name? What did he do? Why did he bring his donation/offering to the apostles?

**So What?**

16. How were the circumstances of the believers unique? (4:23-31) How were they in similar circumstances to us? What can we learn from their prayer? For what do we pray?

17. How does God respond to prayers then and now? Does He respond in similar ways today? If not, why not?

18. What was true biblical community according to Acts 4:32-35? What do you think of it? Have you ever experienced anything even close? Why is it so fragile?