

Sunday, November 11, 2018—Acts 3-5

At the eleventh hour on the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918, the war to end all wars came to an end. Like never before, this war represented conflict on a global scale. Sadly, that war became known as World War I because it did not end all wars. Conflict is part of life.

The early church knew conflict. God was bringing new life to those who turned from evil (3:26). To give weight to those words and bring added attention to those speaking, God worked signs and wonders as He had done in Jesus' ministry—allowing them to speak in tongues in Acts 2 and bring in Acts 3. That attention troubled the religious leaders (4:1).

They seized Peter and John and ordered them not to speak of Jesus any longer. Peter said they could not stop speaking about what they had seen and heard (4:19-20). Despite the opposition they were facing, the number of converts continued to grow. They prayed for God's power to work in them as they continued to share His truth, and the place where they prayed was shaken (4:31). God was working despite the conflict.

Because he could not stop them with outward oppression, Satan tried to hinder the church with the conflict of inward deception. Ananias and Sapphira gave some money and lied about the total amount, hoping to look more generous than they really were. God struck them dead for their lies, and the church was filled with more awe than ever.

Praise God for conflict which drives His people to pray with more fervency and obey with more conviction.

Saturday, November 10, 2018—Acts 1-2

The Gospels tell the story of Jesus—His birth, ministry, death, and resurrection. Acts picks up where those stories end—showing the coming of the

Spirit and the birth of the church. To make a smooth transition, Luke begins with a brief look at Jesus' teaching before His ascension.

Luke says He presented Himself alive with many convincing proofs and appeared for over 40 days, speaking of the Kingdom. In those encounters, He told the disciples to wait for the Spirit, the Father's promise to them (1:3-4). The disciples wondered whether Jesus was finally going to restore the Kingdom (1:6). What else would One who had risen from the dead have in mind? Jesus said that was not for them to know. Their marching orders were to wait on the Spirit and then be His witnesses (1:8).

The disciples obeyed and united themselves in prayer. On the day of Pentecost, a day of celebrating the harvest God provided, God brought in a harvest of His own, thousands of new believers who had gathered from all over the world and heard the news of Jesus in their own language.

The sign of the Spirit stirred many to ask, "What does this mean?" (1:12). Peter boldly proclaimed the work of God through Christ and declared Him both Lord and Messiah (2:36). "What should we do?" they responded (2:37), and Peter told them to repent and receive forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit (2:38). Their acceptance developed into devotion to Jesus and one another.

Pray for patience to wait on the power of the Spirit.

Friday, November 9, 2018—John 18-21

Identity is a powerful concept. Knowing who one is affects what one does and where one goes. Likewise, lack of identity can be debilitating. John closes his Gospel with an examination of the power of identity.

When the mob approached Jesus in the Garden, He said, "I am He," and the men fell to the ground. His identity had power. When someone asked Peter whether he was a disciple, he said, "I am not." He was fulfilling the prophecy of

Jesus and denying who he was. Knowing His identity allowed Jesus to withstand attack. Peter could not do the same.

Later, when Pilate talked with Jesus, He said He was born for being a king (18:37) and to testify to the truth. When they hung Jesus on the cross, Pilate placed a sign above Him declaring exactly who He was—Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Pilate declared to all His identity.

The Jews were angry because Jesus declared Himself to be the Son of God (19:7). The angel at the head and the foot of where He lay in the tomb, reminiscent of the angels on either side of the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies, implied Jesus was the Lamb of God, whose blood covered sin.

Mary called Him Teacher. Thomas called Him, “My Lord and my God” (20:28). All He did and who He was were signs so that one would believe He was the Messiah, and that by believing you may have life in his name (20:30-31). Believe in His identity so He can give you a new one.

Thursday, November 8, 2018—John 14-17

These three chapters are often called the Farewell Discourse. As Jesus prepared His disciples for His departure, He gave them some important, final thoughts. If they had seen Him, they had seen the Father, and if they had seen the Father, their lives should display the difference.

The first characteristic He wanted them to have was peace. There would be plenty they would experience that would potentially be troubling, so He wanted them to know His presence would bring them peace. His presence in them would establish a relationship with Him. That relationship would display love and obedience, two more hallmarks of the faithful.

The Holy Spirit would be the guide for peace, love, and obedience, and He would produce lasting fruit, particularly joy in Christ and love for others. Jesus said all of this would only be possible if His people remained in Him, like a

branch connected to the trunk. This abiding would be vital as the persecution of the world tested all the fruit Jesus produced—peace, love, joy, and obedience. They could not do this without Him.

Finally, Jesus prayed His disciples would be united and holy. He did not ask the Father to take them out of the world but to use them powerfully in the world. He wanted the world to know the reality of His mission by the lives of His disciples (17:23).

Thank God for the call of Jesus and the power of the Spirit. Pray for peace, love, obedience, joy, unity, and holiness to glorify Christ.

Wednesday, November 7, 2018—John 11-13

While God is the creator of logic, not everything He does will make sense in the moment. When Jesus heard his good friend Lazarus was sick, He waited two days rather than rushing to see him. Likewise, His people, when motivated by faith and love, will do things that seem to defy logic. When Jesus' friends heard He was considering going to a dangerous location, Thomas encouraged them all to go die with him (11:16).

Jesus saw a bigger picture. Thomas saw a worthy master. Both were acting in faith and obedience. Neither made sense at the time.

Despite their faith in Him, Mary and Martha struggled with Jesus' delay. Moved by the gravity of the situation, Jesus wept, but He kept moving to the grave and illustrated the majestic power of God over death. "I am the resurrection and the life." For some, this was amazing. For others, this was another reason to eliminate Jesus. He was dangerous.

Later, at Lazarus's house, his sister Mary anointed Jesus with expensive perfume (12:3). This "waste" made no sense to Judas but was an acceptable act of worship in Jesus' eyes. As many began to follow Him, He troubled them by

saying the Messiah had to die (12:34). Isaiah knew the mysterious ways of God when He said His ways are not man's (Isa 55:8).

On His last night with the disciples, Jesus did the unthinkable. He acted as a servant. Thank God for a Master who serves His children and loves them to the end. In obedience, love one another.

Tuesday, November 6, 2018—John 7-10

Light exposes what is in the dark, and the darkness can do nothing about it. When Jesus spoke truth into His world, He caused a stir quite often, but John writes that His enemies often could not stop Him. He wasn't trying to make enemies or be a nuisance. He was dispelling darkness.

Jesus healed on the Sabbath on more than one occasion, and the religious leadership thought this was scandalous. Jesus pointed out that these same leaders would circumcise an infant on the eighth day, even if that day were a Sabbath, in order to fulfill the Law. Why was His working on the Sabbath to bring healing any different? Their problem was with Him and His claims, but they cloaked it in religious language. Nicodemus, a Pharisee himself, was beginning to see the light, and the light was weakening the hold the dark had on his soul. He came to Jesus' defense, using the Law in His favor (7:50-51).

Jesus made clear He was the light of the world (8:12). Anyone who did not believe would die in his sins (8:24), but those continued in my word were his disciples and would know the truth and be set free (8:31-32). This is the power of the Light, and the power came from His identity. Jesus was before Abraham (8:51), though born after Him. He was the I Am.

As the Light, Jesus brought sight to the blind man (9:25) and protection and direction to the sheep (10:1-11). Praise God for the light and life which come from the One who is one with the Father.

Monday, November 5, 2018—John 4-6

Jesus was a troublemaker. His passion to proclaim the Kingdom put him at odds with the Pharisees, so He moved from region to region to avoid their threats. Despite the opposition, He remained on mission. He left Judea to return back home but paused in Samaria, a place Jews avoided. There He found a woman shunned by society but loved by His Father. Engaging her in discussion, He helped her see her need for repentance, and her coming to life in Christ brought many others as well. In John 3, Nicodemus, the Pharisee, did not respond immediately, but in John 4, the outcast woman at the well came to life in a moment.

His commitment to the Law moved Him to return to Jerusalem for a festival. When He came, He found a man lying by the pool of Bethesda, which means “house of mercy.” Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath, a clear violation of the Law in the eyes of many, so He further stoked the ire of the Jews. Making matters worse, He likened Himself to the Father. He did not back down, however. He made clear those who honored Him and believed in His teaching would pass from judgment to life.

Demonstrating His power, Jesus multiplied food and walked in water. He had earlier healed the sick and turned water to wine. Jesus made clear why He worked and why He came—that people would believe in the One God sent (6:29,40,47).

Praise God for the hard words of Jesus which bring eternal life.