

By what power?

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[0:00] We looked at chapter 2, which talks about the coming of the Spirit to the Church. And at the end of that chapter, Luke tells us these words.

Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles, and all the believers were together and had everything in common.

And over these few chapters, from chapter 3 basically to the end of chapter 5, possibly into chapter 6 as well, Luke is giving us examples of those things and showing us in more detail what they mean and how they worked, and sometimes, as we've seen, how they didn't quite work.

But that's a good thing to learn from as well. As I say, in chapter 3 of Acts, we do indeed see an apostolic sign.

Peter heals the cripple at the gate beautiful in the temple. And the stir that this causes gives Peter opportunity for his second address, his second sermon, if you like, recorded there, which actually in some ways is quite similar to the one in Acts 2, but it's different in that instead of talking about Jesus as the king, the king in the line of David, he talks about Jesus as being the prophet in the line of Moses.

[1:32] But again, the argument is much the same. You people didn't listen to the prophet in the line of Moses as you should have done, but now you have a second chance to repent and turn, and some of them did and some of them didn't.

But what I want to focus on here is what happens in chapter 4 and chapter 5. Because as we read it, as you saw, the ruling council, the Sanhedrin, think that things are getting out of hand.

And they need, or they believe they need, to take John and Peter into custody and to stamp on this. And what's going to happen, or what happens, is that the spirit intervenes. So that's basically what we're going to be looking at, the healing miracle we've already mentioned.

The spirit intervenes in this crisis in Acts 4. And then also, we'll look at this idea at the end of all things being held in common. So, the Jews try to silence the message.

[3:00] Peter and John are called before the Jewish council. Will Peter know what to say? But the Holy Spirit comes to his rescue. We notice in verse 8 of chapter 4, Peter is filled here.

The Greek word is *pletho*, which means to fill something up. Peter is filled up with the Holy Spirit. Doesn't say he was full of the Holy Spirit here. We'll look at that next time, perhaps.

And it doesn't say that he was received, or baptized the Holy Spirit, because we already know that it happened already, in Acts 2. So, this is something specific and particular.

At this time, this time of crisis, Peter receives a filling of the Holy Spirit. And perhaps, what that reminds us of, indeed, are these words of Jesus himself, which we find in Luke chapter 12, verses 11 and 12.

I put it on the screen, so you don't need to look it up. Jesus has said this, when you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves, or what you will say.

[4:14] For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time, what you should say. So, notice that Jesus said, the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time.

That's exactly what had happened to Peter and John. They had indeed brought before the rulers and authorities. And the Holy Spirit intervenes to meet that need, as Jesus had promised.

But it's worth, I think, looking at what Peter says. It's not that the Holy Spirit suddenly teaches Peter something he didn't know already, as you might have thought, perhaps, if you'd just had that verse

in Luke.

But I don't think that's actually what is meant here. Peter himself, doesn't it, in one of his letters says, be prepared to give an account of the faith that's in you.

Be prepared in advance, as it were. I think, actually, Jesus was getting at something slightly different here, and this is what this filling of the Holy Spirit means. It's not that Peter would suddenly know something he didn't know before, but rather that he would be empowered to speak it boldly.

[5:28] The Holy Spirit, as it were, would put those words that are already in his mind, and, you know, the defense that he might have started to put together, and make it make sense, make it be declared faithfully and boldly.

And I suspect that's what's, well, I think more suspect, I will suggest to you, that's what, indeed, Luke wants us to understand from this, that Jesus' promise was not so much that, you know, they didn't need to be prepared, because we do need to be prepared, but rather that when the crunch comes, the Holy Spirit will give us that courage, and clarity that we need, and being filled with the Spirit seems to be something like that.

In verse 7, Peter's asked, by what power, or by what name, did you do this? You might have thought, actually, that the word for power there was the word authority, *exousia* in Greek, but actually it isn't.

The word there, again, is the word *dunamis*, energy. What was the force, the energy, that you use in order to heal this man?

See, the council simply cannot deny that something is at work, but they're rather worried about what it is. And so they ask, by what power, and by what name did you do it?

[6:57] And of course, in Jewish thought, name implies, it just doesn't mean, you know, who was it, but name implies, whose authority, whose power, did you use to do this?

Who, was it were present, if not bodily, present, as it were, in spirit, when this, this event took place? And so Peter answers, in fact, he answers the second part of the question, he doesn't answer the first part explicitly.

He says, the name, is Jesus Christ of Nazareth. So, the spirit enables him to testify boldly, to the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

And then you notice, Peter goes on to the offensive. He, starts quoting Old Testament scriptures, about the rejection of God's chosen one, and scriptures, about the rulers conspiring, against the anointed king.

And, the counselor, actually astonished, if you look at verse 13, this is a fisherman. He's no rabbi, he's not a scribe, he's not a particularly educated person, and yet they're astonished, by the wisdom and power of his spirit, empowered message.

[8:21] And what is it they saw? They did indeed see, it tells us in verse 13, that they had, verse 13, they had been, with Jesus. That's what the spirit, makes clear, even to these unbelievers, that they had been, with Jesus.

What a difference, once Peter had, denied being with Jesus, before an inoffensive servant girl, the girl who probably wouldn't have done, anything about it anyway. But now, just these few weeks later, he's prepared to stand up, in front of the whole council, and say, I did this in the name of Jesus, and to say, I have been, indeed, with Jesus.

That very council, which had had Jesus executed. And look what happens, the council's pushed into, a face-saving retreat, you know, in verses 17 and 18.

They realise, verse 16, that they can't hush this up, because everybody's talking about it. They say, well, to stop this thing, from spreading any further, among the people, we must warn these men, to speak no longer, to anyone in this name.

Then they called them in again, and commanded them not to speak, or teach at all, in the name of Jesus. They're trying to save face, by this stage.

[9:54] But, Peter isn't even having that. He's not prepared, to back down. He says, I'm sorry, I know you are the council, but, I can't comply with your order.

We must testify, to what we've seen, and heard. And then, what happens next?

Luke tells us, what happens next? They go back, the council doesn't really have much choice, but to release them, and Peter and John, go back to wherever it is, that the disciples are gathered. It doesn't seem to have been in the temple, at this point, because it seemed to have been, in a separate building, a private building somewhere. It doesn't tell us where it is. But, they go back, and, they tell the believers, what's happened.

And the question is, how will the, believers react? Are they going to say, well, you know, are you sure that was wise, Peter? You know, perhaps we could just, tone it down a bit, maybe, just to, you know, so that, they're not too aggressive about it.

[11:05] But no, they don't react like that at all. What they do, is they react, first of all, with prayer. Verse 24. When they heard this, they raised their voices together, in prayer to God.

That was their reaction, to the threat, that has been put, before them. We're not told, who led the prayer meeting, but we are told, what the prayer was.

And you'll notice, in fact, there are two parts to it. First, there's an appraisal, of the situation, via the relevant scriptures, in verse 24, to 28.

They remind themselves, really, who, in their prayer, who God is. Sovereign Lord, they said, you made the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke, through the Holy Spirit, through the mouth, of your servant, our father David.

Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot, in vain? The kings of the earth, take their stand, and the rulers, gather together, against the Lord, and his anointed one.

[12:11] Again, Herod, and Pontius Pilate, met together, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel. There's a certain irony, in that of course, David had been talking, about the, not the people of Israel, but the heathen kings, the foreign kings.

But, they say, well here in fact, Herod, and Pontius Pilate, and the Gentiles, have conspired, with the, people of Israel, against the servant Jesus, whom you anointed.

And they remind themselves again, as Peter had said, on several occasions, they did what your power, and will, had decided beforehand, should happen. So it wasn't, that it had gone wrong, or you know, it got all, got out of control.

They reminded themselves again, this was exactly what, God had said would happen. And then, they, turned to their actual intercession, in verses 29, and 30.

Now Lord, consider the threats, and enable your servants, to speak your word, with great boldness. Stretch out your hand, to heal, and perform miraculous signs, and wonders, through the name, of your holy servant, Jesus.

[13:25] You notice, that there are, two parts, to the prayer. They pray for, boldness, in verse 29, and then they pray, for signs, authenticating signs, in verse 30.

And their prayer, is answered. But again, let me remind you, well, yes, their prayer, is answered. And, and there is a sign, I don't think one should, say that there isn't a sign, there is a sign, the building, is shaken, and that sign is there, to remind them, that the Lord, is sovereign, the Lord, does have power.

And yet, again, it's, it's, similar in fact, to in Acts 2. The sign, when the spirit comes, is actually quite, low key. You know, it's not, no mountains involved, no fire on the mountain.

The building, is shaken, not the mountain, is shaken, the building where they are, is shaken. It's there, to remind the people, that God is sovereign, God comes in power. But it seems to me, that Luke is telling us, that's not really, what God is focused on.

[14:40] He does answer that prayer, for a sign. But, the real answer, to their prayer, is the next bit. Where he says, they all, they were all filled, with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke boldly.

Notice, what the result, of the council's attempt, to intimidate, John, and Peter was. It wasn't just Peter, now, that was filled, with the Holy Spirit, and spoke boldly.

They all were, the whole church, assembled there. The council had tried, to marginalize, the apostles message, and suppress the church. But the spirit, had other ideas.

The result, of this intimidation, was that, not just the apostle, would speak out now, but everyone. And again, let me, remind you, that, these people, had received the spirit, before.

This is not the, initial baptism, of the spirit. These were believers, who had already, received the spirit. This was a special, filling, and empowering, so that they could, speak the word boldly. [15:43] And this idea, of being filled, with the spirit, as we read through Acts, we see that, being filled, with the spirit, is usually associated, certainly it is here, with proclaiming the word.

The one who stands up, to proclaim the word, should expect, to be filled, with the spirit, in this sense. There's a new filling, for a specific purpose.

There's a comfort, and there's an encouragement, for God's people in this. I guess all of us wonder, don't we, how we'd stand up, under persecution, of various sorts. We do, of course, in the, in the West here, we have it pretty easy.

And we read, perhaps, the tales, of the martyrs. There's a book, called Fox's Book of Martyrs. It's gone, rather gone out of fashion now, I think. But I think it is worth reading, if you ever get the chance.

It's a description, of the martyrs, in the, after the Reformation. People who were burnt, at the stake, for their faith. And, one of them actually, one of the stories, says that, the person who was going to be, burnt, had been speaking to his friends, and said, if it's possible, still to rejoice, in the fire, will you put your arms up, when the, the rope has broken, and so, you know, the rope has burnt, so he could put his arms up.

[17:08] And indeed, the, the man did indeed, put his arms up, so that his friends, who were watching, could see, that he was still, able to rejoice, in the flames. But we doubt that, don't we?

I mean, we look at it, and think, we're never going to be able, to do that. And of course, we could, in our own strength, we couldn't do that. But the Holy Spirit, has promised that, well Jesus has promised, that the Holy Spirit, will be there, when we need him.

And I think, we should, remember this, that if it does come, the stage, where we are, persecuted in the West, and we think, in terms of the, our brethren, in other countries, who are even now, being persecuted.

We shouldn't forget, that promise of Jesus, that the Holy Spirit, would come. And that when, the time comes, that they would be, filled, and have that, power to speak up, boldly, even under, persecution.

But of course, it is in the power, of the Holy Spirit, not everyone, and some people, have apparently, cracked, under the pressure, not everyone, is able to, stand up.

[18:19] And so we need, to remember, that we need, to remember those words, of Jesus. You know, we shouldn't be afraid, in that sense, but we should remember, that it's the Holy Spirit, who's going to enable us, to speak, if it comes to that.

So the enemy, has tried intimidation, and that's failed. So he's going to try, subversion now instead. Luke now gives us a warning, there's another side, to the presence, of the Spirit, in the church. Just in passing though, we might note, how Luke, the master storyteller, packs so much, into just a few verses, if we just look at those, verses from 32, through to verse 36, he tells us, the believers, were in heart and mind.

He's illustrating, sorry do I need to, it's alright, I'm going to, next slide in a minute actually. The believers, were in, of one heart and mind.

He illustrates, what he'd said in Acts 2, about them having all things, in common, and gives particular examples, of how it worked, or at least how it should have worked. And also, he manages to introduce, to us Barnabas, who of course, is going to be a major, figure in what follows.

[19:45] Barnabas is an important, character in Acts. So Luke manages, to pack all that, just into these, few verses. But here, we're, showed Barnabas, which, that's his nickname, he tells us, in verse 36, his actual name was Joseph, he was a, a Levite, not a Levite, born in Jerusalem, or, but he was from Cyprus, and the apostles, gave him this nickname, of Barnabas, which means, son of encouragement.

Delightful name, to be given, wouldn't it be nice, to be, somebody to say, of you or me, this guy is a son of encouragement, or a daughter of encouragement. And the particular encouragement, he brings at this time, is he, is one of these people, who happen to own a field, that he, he doesn't

need.

And so he sells it, and he brings the money, and it says, what it says, he laid it at the apostles feet, or put it at the apostles feet. It's not actually, entirely clear here, whether, this is in, within the assembly of the church, and the apostles, are sort of sitting at the front, and they, bring the, bring it up, bring the money to the front, and lay it down, as it might do, when we take an offering. Or perhaps, it was done, kind of in secret, as we do here, we don't take a collection plate, around, we have a box at the back, if you want to put some money in it. But, we don't make it public. It's not entirely clear, actually, which is happening here. It does seem that, possibly, it wasn't in the full assembly of the church, and yet, certainly, the church heard about it, and, and there were some people there, who, other than the apostles, so, it's perhaps not entirely clear, but it doesn't really matter, too much.

[21:41] But, Barnabas, brought this money, sold his field, brought this money, and gave it to the apostles, for the, the welfare of those, in the church, who were less well off.

That's a very practical, brand of encouragement, that he brought. But there, the enemy, seizes opportunity. And so, we read in chapter five, of Ananias and Sapphira, who also had a piece, of property.

Go on to the next, slide. And Luke's very careful, to tell us that, they both agreed, to do this. Doesn't tell us, whose idea it was.

But, they agreed, to do this. And what did they do? They also sold, a piece of property. Suggests, it probably was a piece, of land again. And, they brought that, to the apostles, feet as well.

Peter, seems to know, instantly, doesn't he, that Ananias, is lying. We're not told, how he knew.

[23:00] It's possible, I suppose, that somebody, shocked him. But it seems, more likely, that Peter, was given, some, spiritual, insight. We're not actually, told what Ananias, and his wife, died of either.

Presumably, some heart failure, brought on by the guilt, or by the direct, intervention of the spirit. Greek, like most languages, has lots of words, for dying.

And the particular one, that's used here, is the one, gave up the spirit, or gave up the breath, which might, suggest, the same one, that's used of the death, of Jesus himself, in fact. So it might have been, some intervention, of the spirit.

But there's two things, Peter's very clear about, and Luke is very keen, to tell us about. The first thing, is, what their crime was.

And he tells us, this in detail, doesn't he, in verses, three, two, three and four. It wasn't, that they, they were obliged, to, sell this land.

[24:16] To say, this is not communism, where there's, you know, everybody's obliged, to hold the property, in common. Some, Christian groups, have gone for that, but I think it's wrong, actually.

It's, it's not, the biblical, teaching. They weren't obliged, to hold their property, in common, or anything like that. As Peter says, quite clearly, this is your property.

You decided, to sell it. And if you'd sold it, you could have said, well, you know, I need to keep, half the money, for my own family. But, I'm going to give the rest, to, to the, work of the church.

That would have been, perfectly acceptable. It was within, your right to do that. It was your money.

Didn't it belong to you, before it was sold, and after it was sold, wasn't the money, at your disposal.

So, if that wasn't the crime, their crime, what was their crime? Well, he tells us now, doesn't he?

What made you think, of doing such a thing? You have not lied, to men, but to God.

[25:26] Their lie, was a lie, to the apostles, apparently, but, their lie, was a lie, really, to God.

And what, what was it? What was the crime, really? What was their motive? Their motive, was to appear, more spiritual, than they really were, wasn't it? Wasn't it?

Possibly, they were, jealous, of the good reputation, that Barnabas had, but, basically, their crime, was, fake spirituality, or, if you want to use, the technical term, as Chris was reminding us, this morning, hypocrisy, pretending, something, that really, they really weren't, they were, pretending, to be spiritual, but, in fact, pretending, to be better, than they really were.

And Peter says, well, it's bad enough, lying to the apostles, and to the church, but, actually, Ananias, and Sapphira, actually, Christian believer, it's much worse, than that, because, Peter calls

it, a lie to God, in fact, more specifically, in verse 3, he calls it, a lie to the Holy Spirit, in verse 4, he calls it, a lie to God, and then again, in verse 9, when he's talking to Sapphira, he calls it, testing, the spirit of the Lord, hypocrisy, pretending, to be what we're not, faking, spirituality, and holiness, and that, in some ways, is, one of the deadliest, sins of all, pretending, to lie, didn't Jesus say, that, every, every, manner of sin, will be, forgiven men, but not, lying to the Holy Spirit, not blaspheming, the Holy Spirit, because, to pretend, to be what we're not, is, the deadliest sin, of all, and yet, every one of us, is tempted to us,

I'm sure we are, surely, all of us, have fallen into it, at one time, or another, we pretend, to be better, than we really are, we pretend, to, for some, spiritual, virtue, that, we really don't have, or, if we do have, at least, we don't have it, to the extent, that we, pretend it, we're all tempted, to that, if you get a chance, read C.S. Lewis's book, Screwtape Letters, in, it's the, Screwtape Letters, it's a weird sort of a book, really, it purports to be, the, the letters, from a senior devil, to a junior devil, and, who's at work, in trying to sabotage, the, life of this young believer, and he gives the devil, he gives the junior devil, advice, and all sorts of different ways, you can twist people, into hypocrisy, and one of them, he actually says, is, you know, if, if your subject, realises, that he's, being hypocrite, and repents of it, then you make sure, you make him proud, of repenting, we can even parade, our sinfulness sometimes, can't we, to prove to the church, how humble we are, if the devil, can get us, unreal, in any way he can, he's going to do, just that, so it is worth reading, the Screwtape Letters, if you get the chance, he's going to use hypocrisy, to tie us in knots, and to suppress, the spirit, which he couldn't do, by intimidation, but there is, an opportunity, to repent, at least,

[29:31] Sapphira was given, an opportunity, to repent, she was asked, again in verse, eight, is this the price, you and Ananias, got for the land, you'd have thought, she would have had time, to have second thoughts, wouldn't you, or maybe, you know, maybe he wasn't sure, whether she'd been involved, in it or not, but it certainly, gave her a second chance, to come clean, but she didn't, did she, yes she said, that's the price, and Peter says, how could you agree, to test the spirit, of the Lord, and then she suffers, the same fate, as her husband, in what sense, is this testing, the spirit, it's suggesting, isn't it, that the spirit, might be prepared, to live with an untruth, but he's the spirit, of truth, and of course, all our churches, consist entirely, of sinners, and as I said, all of us, I'm sure, from time to time, are hypocrites, we all do it, to some extent, but the spirit, shines on the lie, gives us the opportunity, to change, and I think, we need to do that, not just once, but constantly, there is, a need for, there is a right fear, although John says, that perfect love, casts out fear, yet there is a right, sort of fear, as well, and we find that in, well we find it, twice actually, in this passage, but particularly, in verse 11, great fear, sees the whole church, and all who heard, about these events, when they were intimidated, from outside, they were bold, but when they realized, the sin, that could grow up, in the church itself, and what God, was prepared, to do about that, then they feared, and that was a right fear, and if a lie, is tolerated, within the church, what will happen, one of two things, the lie, will drive out the spirit, and the church, will die, just leaving, the husk, that remains, the structure, might remain, but it will not, truly be a church, of the Lord Jesus Christ, if the spirit, is gone, if the Lord, no longer, walks, among the candlesticks, for that church, or if the, the lie, does not drive out, the spirit, then the spirit, will drive out, the lie, and the liar, and he might not be, quite as drastic, as in this case, where the integrity, of the newborn church, is threatened, but if you look, at numbers, chapter 32, verses 22, and 23, the context, of this, is the, the Israelites, who were, going to, settle on, the, the, west, east side, sorry, east side, of the Jordan, had, as though, people were about, to cross the Jordan, says, can we, can we leave our wives, and children, behind here, and, we will go across, with you, but, we read this, in, verse 22, and,

Joshua, wants them, to be clear, that they must, agree, to, conquer the land, with the rest, of the people, and he says, when the land, is subdued, before the Lord, you may return, and be free, from your obligation, to the Lord, and to Israel, and this land, will be your possession, before the Lord, but if you fail, to do this, you will be sinning, against the Lord, and you may be sure, that your sin, will find you out, that's another one, of these verses, that's often, quoted out of context, but I think perhaps, justifiably, in this case, because it's not just, that particular sin, that will find you out, but any sin, will find you out, sometimes, after many years, we've seen in the news, haven't we, of those, bishops, and those church leaders, who, for many years, after many years, of hiding, their sin, eventually, found it, revealed, and what, damage, must have been done, in the church, over those years, so, the Holy Spirit, doesn't always act, instantly, as he did here, but this, your sin, the spirit, will find out, your sins, in the end, so, what can we, learn, what have we learned, from these, incidents, we see, we've learned, first of all, that the spirit, will come to us, when we need him, he's promised,

Jesus promised, that he would, and that we, will be upheld, under threat, but the spirit, comes to the church, when the spirit, comes to the church, there's a price, and there's a risk, involved, because the spirit, is the spirit, of truth, he will not, tolerate, deception, or foolishness, so, let's finish, with those words, from Proverbs, well-known words, again, from Proverbs, one, verse seven, which tells us, the fear of the Lord, is the beginning, of knowledge, that fools, despise wisdom, and discipline, if we want the spirit, to come to us, we must be prepared, for his discipline, and his shining, our light, his light, on what is wrong, in our own lives, but he will, not, test us, beyond, what we're able, to bear, as scripture says, so, I've chosen, as our final hymn, a missionary hymn, a network, network, a network, a network,!

a network,! a network, a network, network,