

THE FIRST CHURCH IN JERUSALEM

Acts 3:1–7:60

Key verses 4:32–33

„All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all.“

Praise and thanks be to God for giving us this historic Global Leadership Empowerment Forum. May God work powerfully among us with his word and his holy spirit, strengthening and equipping us to fulfill his plan for world mission until the end!

The first lesson greatly encourages us with Acts 1:8. Our Lord Jesus promised: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Based on this promise, let us serve God’s work with confidence that we may grow, like the apostles, into courageous and powerful servants of the Word.

In today's text, we will look at chapters 3–7. The early church in Jerusalem was facing fierce opposition and persecution. But they were not helpless; they experienced God's help by remaining steadfast in the Word of God and in prayer. Above all, the Holy Spirit worked powerfully among them. Let us learn in this hour the spiritual secret of how God was able to work so powerfully in and through the early church. Let us proclaim the gospel of Jesus with all boldness to the ends of the earth and experience God's powerful work of spiritual revival in Germany, Europe, the M-world, and to the ends of the earth.

1) The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Early Church (3:1–5:42)

First: The healing of the paralyzed man

Let us look at chapter 3:1-2 and read the verses: “One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.” Peter and John were on their way to the temple to hold their prayer meeting at the ninth hour.

A man who had been paralyzed from birth was lying at the temple gate. He begged and hoped to receive a generous gift from the apostles. How did Peter react? Let's look at verse 4. Peter did not simply walk past this paralyzed man, but looked at him with the eyes of faith and with the hope of God. Let's read verse 6: “Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” He did not help him according to his expectations but gave him what he desperately needed: healing from his paralysis and healing from his beggar mentality. Peter was not a doctor. He

did not have silver or gold either. But he had something he could give the beggar; it was the name of Jesus.

Believing in the power of the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Peter said to the paralyzed man, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!" Peter was often paralyzed by fear, even though he was a man of great words. But Jesus helped him with the heart of a shepherd, enabling him to know the authority of God through faith in the name of Jesus and to move mountains into the sea. Peter gave the paralyzed man the best treasure he could give. The name of Jesus has authority not only to heal paralysis, but also to completely heal and transform a person's being.

Let's look and read verses 7 and 8: "Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God."

A miracle from God had happened! The greatest miracle was his inner transformation. The beggar had lived every day full of ingratitude and dependence on others. But now he went to the temple and praised God and thanked him for his healing, that he was freed from his paralysis and beggar mentality. It was a wonderful work of God that a paralyzed man was healed and transformed into a joyful witness of Jesus and a new creature.

Like the beggar, I was spiritually paralyzed and dead, living for pleasure and ego with the wrong goal in life. I sought happiness, security, and success. I often saw only the short-term benefits, like material things, money, success in my career, and fun in the world. Blinded by these things, I devote all my time and energy to them, only to realize after a moment that all these things are meaningless and do not give me true satisfaction and joy. I am like the paralyzed man who, without the name of Jesus, was lost under the power of sin and death and deserved only eternal damnation. Thanks and praise be to the Lord that he healed and brought life to me, a spiritually paralyzed person through the faithful service and faith of the servant of God and my parents, and especially through his Word in Ephesians 2:10 and Romans 6:12-13.

These words allowed me to hold fast to the power of the name of Jesus, who paid for my sins on the cross and washed me clean with his precious blood. Now, based on Genesis 6:9, God wants to use me as a Noah of the 21st century to lead many lost souls, many spiritually paralyzed people, to the ark of salvation in Jesus.

In verses 13 to 18, we see Peter's courage before the crowd. With a shepherd's heart, he revealed their sin in order to give them the opportunity to repent by naming their evil deeds. Let us also read verses 15 and 16: "You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see." The power of resurrection is greater than the power of sin and death. Only in Jesus there is true salvation and complete deliverance from the power of sin. The healing of the paralyzed man was a proof that Jesus lives.

God continues to do His wonderful work today through those who have faith in the power of the name of Jesus Christ. We see such healing and transformation in the lives of the next

generation. This healing work is the living message that Jesus is alive, and it opens the door for God's mighty work in Europe through the power of the name of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's look at verse 19: „Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,“

Let us also fearlessly proclaim the message of repentance with the power of resurrection, so that the time of refreshment may come to Europe and young people may receive the true blessing of healing and eternal life. Let us share the name of Jesus with young people through 1:1 Bible study teams at each of the 1,700 universities, so that this continent may receive spiritual renewal and revival through the power of the name of Christ Jesus.

Second: Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (Chapter 4)

The news of the miraculous healing of the paralyzed man spread like wildfire throughout the temple. While the two apostles Peter and John were still speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees were already forging an “anti-resurrection alliance.” The religious leaders had hoped that with Jesus' condemnation and crucifixion, the “Jesus case” would be closed forever. But the opposite was true. Jesus' tomb had been empty, and the risen Lord Jesus appeared to many believers.

Let us look at Acts 4:3-4: “They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.”

Nothing hates Satan more than the fact that Jesus, through His resurrection, achieved eternal victory over Satan and over all the power of sin and death. While the authorities did everything in their power to prevent God's work, God's Word worked all the more powerfully in those who heard it. Many came to faith through the preached Word of God! The number of believing men rose to five thousand!

In schools and universities, various false teachings are flooding young people. For example, godless humanism says, “Man is good!” or relativism says, “The Bible is a human work,” gender theory says, “Choose your own gender and live as you want,” and evolutionary theory says, “You are descended from apes.” But regardless of this spiritual situation, we can preach the gospel of Jesus' resurrection and experience God's powerful work through it. God has left behind many holy seeds and stumps among them, which he wants to use to spread out his kingdom.

What happened the next morning when the entire Sanhedrin, the rulers, elders, and scribes, gathered together? They asked Peter and John, “By what power or in what name did you do this?” They tried to intimidate and frighten Peter and John. Did Peter and John become fearful? No! They became new creatures through the power of the resurrection. With the power of the Holy Spirit, they became courageous witnesses of Jesus' resurrection.

Let's look at verses 10b to 11: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.”

What a precious promise this is for us too. Afflictions, opposition, hostility, and even persecution are an inevitable part of the life of believers. But we do not need to fear them. Rather, such events make us spiritually stronger and more courageous. We learn that God Himself speaks to us and through us by the Holy Spirit.

Let us think of the Roman Empire, where Christians were thrown to wild beasts or burned as torches. Let us think of communism and Nazism, which tortured countless Christians in prisons and labor camps. Or let us also think of the corrupt church itself, which persecuted believers without insight and executed many as heretics. Did Christianity perish as a result? No! God worked and works all the more powerfully in times of suffering and persecution, spreading his gospel among all people.

Let's look and read verse 12 together: „Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

This word is the climax of Peter's message. Peter once lived as an ordinary fisherman. He dreamed of owning his own fish restaurant. One time, he had worked all night and caught nothing. Disappointed, he returned to shore early in the morning with empty nets. Jesus was waiting for him there and commanded Peter, “ Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.” Peter obeyed and made the “catch of his life“: a net full of fish that even began to tear. Through this, Peter learned who Jesus is. He fell down before the holy God and cried out, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man! But Jesus said to him, “Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men.” There were many more ups and downs in Peter's life. But Jesus never gave up on him and served him with the hope of God until the end. Now Peter testified with the power of the Holy Spirit: „Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” Today, teachings such as humanism and genderism are sold to us as “salvation” for humanity. But there is no philosophy, ideology, or worldview that can bring “salvation” to mankind! Even money and weapons will never bring salvation to this world! True, eternal, and perfect salvation is found only in our Lord Jesus, the Savior and Redeemer!

Let us consider verses 13 and 14. The authorities saw the boldness of Peter and John and were amazed. They realized that they were uneducated, simple people. But they couldn't explain how they could proclaim the name of Jesus so boldly and joyfully. They even saw with their own eyes that a man who had been paralyzed for years was healed and was jumping around joyfully and praising God.

For the leaders, the time had now come to beat their breasts, turn to Jesus, and make a new start. But the religious leaders made the wrong decision. They threatened the apostles not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus anymore.

Let us read verses 19 and 20: „But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” The apostles knew that their calling and mission came from God. They also knew that they had to obey God rather than men. That is why they did not allow themselves to be intimidated or silenced.

Peter and John's determination to proclaim the truth and magnify the name of Jesus encourages us to boldly proclaim the truth in a time when there are many false teachings.

We have received our calling and mission from the living God who created heaven and earth.

This God called a hopeless egoist and useless salesman of light bulbs and vacuum cleaners, according to Luke 5:10b, to be a shepherd and Bible teacher for intellectual young people. This God gave him the privilege of studying at the renowned UBF Bonn University and founding a blessed house church for world mission.

With the power of the Holy Spirit, I—and we, the next generation—can overcome all inner fear in order to be used as courageous and powerful witnesses of Jesus Christ and chosen instruments of God. Like Peter and John, we can resist the spirit of this 21st century in order to fearlessly and courageously obey God and his Word more than men!

How did the church respond to the apostles' report? Let's look at verses 24-29. After their release, the apostles came to the church of God. They knew that the church had been praying for them without ceasing. They knew that without this spiritual support they would have been unable to do anything. A church in which prayer is the top priority is a church in which and through which God works powerfully.

The unanimous prayer of the church is the source of strength, encouragement, and the firm foundation for God's further work. The prayer vessel of the church is crucially important for spiritual leadership, for our messengers, and for the spiritual mobilization of the next generation and young leaders on campus. Let us pray persistently for pioneering all 1,700 universities in Europe and for the maturing bearers of hope such as Paul Ezra and Noa Marie. God will bless our common prayer for Olaf, David, and Mostafa and grant them victory of faith in their professional lives and studies. He will surely grant each of them a decision of faith for a new life with Christ.

Let us look at verse 31: "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." When the church prayed unanimously and from the heart for their suffering leaders, the place where they were meeting was shaken. Every single member of the church was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness. This testifies that God graciously accepted and answered their prayer of faith.

Let us strengthen, renew, and intensify our common prayer, beginning with early morning prayer, until the place in Europe shakes, that Germany and Europe may be restored as a kingdom of priests for world mission. Prayer is not a ritual that makes us feel better. Praying means talking to God and listening from God, the almighty, living, and holy Creator God. Through our joint prayer, God will cause the hearts of young people to tremble and shake, so that many will convert to the Lord their God!

As once before, through the power of prayer, beginning with Christians in Leipzig's St. Nicholas Church, the peaceful transition in East Germany, even the fall of the Iron Curtain to Eastern Europe, and finally the reunification of Germany without bloodshed was prepared.

Third: The community of goods among the first Christians and Satan's internal trial (4:32–5:42)

This section reports on the internal trials that Satan brought upon the believers during the period of great growth of Christ's first church, threatening to break their burning spirit for Jesus and for world mission and to divide them. Luke also reports on how uncompromisingly the apostles fought against Satan's temptations.

Let us read the key verses of today's passage 4:32 and 33: „All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all.“

Here, “all the believers” are not nominal believers or ordinary church members, but people who have accepted Jesus and given Him dominion over their lives. The first Christians were those who repented through the preaching of Peter and the other apostles and accepted Jesus as their Lord. They came from very different countries, professions, and social classes. But now they were ONE in Christ, who was their Savior and Lord.

We know how difficult it can sometimes be, to be of one heart and one soul even within a family. But for these believers, it was possible, because Jesus was at the center of their lives. Jesus lived in them, and they were part of the body of Christ.

The greater the threat from the religious leaders became, more firmly they formed the vessel of prayer and love for one another. The greater the persecution became, the more clearly they stood on the side of God's truth and testified with great power to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God's grace was powerful at work in them all. With the grace of God, they overcame everything and lived in Jesus free from all threats and all worries. No one was fearful or stingy; all were one in heart and mind.

Their new attitude is also evident in their attitude toward material possessions. According to verse 32b, they didn't think that anything belonged to “me,” but rather that it belonged to “everyone together.” They always sought what served the fellowship or others. One example was Barnabas, who sold his entire field, brought all the money, and put it at the apostles' feet (37). When the Christians acted in this way, they lived according to the example of Jesus and formed a beautiful spiritual community.

What else distinguished this church? Let's read verse 33 again: “ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all.“ The first church was a mission-centered church. The apostles testified with great power to the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus' resurrection was their source of strength, which had brought their originally dead bones to life.

Like these believers in the first church, I also learn to form this unity with God's people. The foundation is crucial here. It determines what I build my life on. Here I can examine myself to see if Jesus is my Lord and Savior. In theory, I believe that Jesus is the Lord and Savior of my life. But in practice, my life was dominated by my ego and evil desires. Everything revolved around me and was supposed to benefit me. As a result, I neglected fellowship and cooperation in God's work. I lived without relationship to God, my parents, and the co-workers. Although I lived in the common life at the center for a time and saw the heart and

dedication of the missionaries, I was not willing to place my life under the lordship of Jesus and devote myself completely to God's work.

A bicycle accident at the age of 17 made me realize that I can not protect my life on my own. By God's grace alone, God protected my life from worse consequences. It is solely His unilateral grace and love for me that he did not condemn me despite my shortcomings and weaknesses, but through His only Son Jesus Christ, He grants salvation through His precious blood.

God wants that in my new life, I offer every part of my myself to Him as an instrument of righteousness and work together in one heart and mind for the spread of His kingdom. As we call together before every meal, I want to belong to this "We are one Team" and be used in a precious way for world mission and the spread of God's Word, starting in Germany, Europe, and extending to the M-world. I pray that I may learn from Noah in the Bible to recognize God's will and carry out God's counsel in these end times and be used as a man of obedience.

In the midst of this beautiful work of faith, in which the church was one in heart and mind, there was a cunning attack by Satan.

Let us look at chapter 5:1-2: "Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet."

This internal conflict within the church was caused by Ananias and his wife Sapphira. They sold their field, but brought only part of the money as an offering to the apostles. Nevertheless, they pretended to have brought the entire proceeds. Their actions were not only a deception of people, but also an attempt to deceive God. They feigned complete devotion and wanted to be seen as generous, pious members of the church. God gave Peter clear insight so that he could expose their dishonest motive. Peter knew that Ananias's action could have a leavening effect and lead many believers into impurity. Peter seriously rebuked him and told him to repent. But Ananias did not repent and fell down and died. Sapphira also lied about this matter and had to suffer the deadly consequences of her sin.

Verse 11 says, "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events." God used this sad event to establish holy fear of God in the church and beyond. As the believers lived in fear of God, God's mighty work continued to be done through them. The apostles proclaimed the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power, and many miracles were performed.

Let us consider verses 17–18: "Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail." The Sadducees in particular were filled with jealousy and laid hands on the apostles. But God was with the apostles in prison and sent an angel to open the prison doors during the night. However, God's guidance for the apostles was not to hide, quite the contrary.

Let us read verses 20: “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.” Early in the morning, the apostles continued their mission in the temple. They wasted no time in carrying out God's command.

The apostles did not stop teaching and preaching the gospel of Jesus every day in the temple and in homes. Spiritual house churches were formed in which the apostles spoke all the words of life. The high priest then asked (28): “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.” How did the apostles respond? Let us read verses 29-32 and pay particular attention to how Peter and John responded. “Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings! The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

They fearlessly testified to the glorious victory of Jesus Christ. They invited all listeners to acknowledge Jesus' victory and to bring about a change of reign in their lives through repentance and forgiveness of sins. The apostles also testified to whom God gives the Holy Spirit, namely those who obey Him. In this situation, God used a very respected Pharisee from the Sanhedrin named Gamaliel. He was a scribe who persuaded the Sanhedrin to “only” flog the apostles and forbid them to speak in the name of Jesus. Then the apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been deemed worthy to suffer dishonor for Jesus' name. Because God was with them through the Holy Spirit, they were full of confidence in victory and joy. They did not allow themselves to be silenced. Every day they went out fresh and cheerful to their mission and harvest field and preached the gospel of Jesus. Here we learn to obey and fear God more than man in all things. In this way, we may receive the power of the Holy Spirit and be used as courageous witnesses of the gospel at all universities in Germany, Europe, and even in the M-world.

II. Internal trial and external hardships in the first church (6:1–7:60)

Chapter 6 reports that there were apparently two groups of believers who identified themselves as Hebraic Jews and Hellenistic Jews. Now it is reported that the Hellenistic widows had been overlooked in the daily distribution of food. Until then, the apostles had taken care of the distribution of supplies and meals.

Satan is very cunning in exploiting a cause for his own ends and bringing discontent, grumbling, and finally even division into a church. The twelve apostles now called all the disciples to a meeting. Let's look at verses 2b-4 and read the verses together: “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

The apostles' greatest concern was not food, but that they might neglect the word of God. This shows their clear priority and focus on prayer and the Word of God. Therefore, from

now on, they wanted to concentrate on their actual task, namely, the proclamation of the Word of God. For the distribution of food and social services, they appointed seven deacons to take care of these daily needs.

Verse 7 says: "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith." Here we see once again that through the good guidance of the Holy Spirit, a wise decision was made. The apostles concentrated entirely on the word of God. God blessed this, so that the number of disciples became large. Even many priests became obedient to the faith. A church needs the Word of God as its firm anchor and foundation for growth. The meetings of the early church were primarily fellowships of the Word, where Bible study was the focus. The most important point for us today is not the community itself, but Bible study and our common prayer for spiritual revival and for world mission.

God gave his servant M. Peter a precious decision of faith, so that after obtaining his doctorate, he didn't pursue a worldly career, but decided to serve God's work full-time and remain completely faithful to the Word of God. Under this decision, our native shepherds such as the deacons, were able to grow as shepherds, Bible teachers, and messengers of the Word of God. Even in times of trials and persecution, God gave his servant the decision to build up and equip his co-workers and hope-bearers spiritually with the Word of God through leadership seminars, master courses, and GLEF. In this way, the next generation were able to grow into independent and powerful servants of the Word and knowledgeable Bible teachers, learning to focus on the Word of God despite school and university studies and to grow into influential spiritual leaders.

One of the most influential deacons was Stephen. He is described as a man of faith and full of the Holy Spirit, who did miracles and great signs among the people with grace and power. Verse 9 reports that some from other synagogues stood up and argued with Stephen. But they could not resist the wisdom and the Spirit in which Stephen spoke. Finally, with their corrupt hearts, they incited other men to claim that they had heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God. So they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes against him and brought him before the Sanhedrin. In the midst of this fierce attack by Satan, the peace of God and the Spirit of God rested upon his faithful servant Stephen. All his adversaries in the council saw Stephen's face as the face of an angel.

When Stephen was so vehemently accused, the high priest asked him, "Is this so?" Instead of speaking angrily against the false accusations, Stephen spoke about the mighty works of God and God's plan of salvation for His people, beginning with the patriarchs Abraham, Moses, and Jacob. God's wonderful plan for Israel was revealed to all those gathered through Stephen's speech. As he described God's mighty works throughout history in such detail, he was filled even more with the Spirit of God and spoke boldly and courageously to his countrymen, preaching repentance. Instead of repenting, his accusers gnashed their teeth.

Let us see verses 55-56: "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." God gave Stephen

spiritual insight. He saw Jesus, the Son of Man, standing at the right hand of God. How did his accusers react? They cried out loudly, covered their ears, and rushed upon him as one! The adversaries drove Stephen out of the city and stoned him!

From a human perspective, this was a terrible hour for the young church. Spiritually speaking, however, this was already the beginning of a new and powerful work of God. Verse 58b says, “And the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.” Saul, at that time still a fanatical Pharisee who persecuted Christians, became an eyewitness to Stephen's death. He heard the prayer that Stephen cried out on his knees in his dying hour: (60) “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” Saul later remembered this incident. God was already preparing the environment for Saul's conversion. Let us learn from Stephen's love for his enemies and his martyr's spirit, and serve God's work with his faith, spirit, and shepherd's heart. Let us pray that through 10,000 1:1 Bible study teams, we may proclaim the whole truth of God's Word to our people and this generation and experience the mighty work of God through the Holy Spirit. Stephen's martyrdom was not the end of God's work, but rather the starting point for world missions. With such a vision and a martyr's spirit, we can speak words of life on campus and invite young people to follow Jesus with determination.

Today we learned how powerfully the Holy Spirit worked in and through the first church in Jerusalem. When the Holy Spirit empowered the apostles and the church formed a strong vessel of prayer, God's powerful work was evident: the risen Lord Jesus was powerfully witnessed; the glorious grace of God was among them, and the church was even able to clearly reject Satan's cunning attacks. Let us also—during this GLEF and beyond—experience the powerful work of God through the power of the Holy Spirit in our personal lives and among us, so that we may be witnesses of the risen and living Christ—at all 1,700 universities in Germany and Europe and even in the M-world.