

NT LESSON #28  
"WE ARE WITNESSES"  
ACTS 1-5  
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**Introduction:** Have you been called to testify because you were a witness. Have you had the opportunity to tell about an event because you saw it when others did not? I gave testimony once about the particulars of a car wreck. It happened while I was watching and I was asked to describe what I had witnessed because some of those who would make a final decision about that accident had not witnessed the events. I gave testimony in a case involving assault and have been called as a character witness.

The eleven, following the resurrection of Christ, were witnesses of an event utterly unique in the history of the world. They had seen and touched and talked with and eaten with a being who had been dead and buried. All of the miracles of Christ were wonderful, but they had all been performed by prophets of old—the dead had been raised, the leper cleansed, the blind healed. But no one had ever risen from the tomb, folded his grave clothes, and walked by his own power from death into life. This event, more than any other, proved the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. And of that event, they were to be witnesses.

Luke, the Physician, wrote a two-part testimony of the ministry of Christ and his disciples. That testimony, written to Theophilus (Acts 1:1) is recorded in Luke and in the book of Acts. The pattern of the book of Acts is given in Acts 1:8.

"But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, ye shall be witnesses un to me both in Jerusalem [Act 1-5], and in all Judea, and in Samaria [Acts 6-9], and unto the uttermost part of the earth [Acts 10-28].

**I. THE LORD ASCENDS INTO HEAVEN AND MATTHIAS IS CALLED TO BE AN APOSTLE (Acts 1)**

The Christian world is at a loss to explain the significance of the 40-day ministry mentioned in Acts 1:3. Since no readily available records remain to give a clear and general picture of those teachings, scholars have been forced

to conclude that they cannot have been very important. But the Book of Mormon. Especially 3 Nephi, devotes many chapters to those post-resurrection teachings. Note this from Hugh Nibley:

There are some other contextualizing points [which we will cover] very quickly. We know that this is a part of the forty-day literature. We know that certain esoteric, secret, and important things happened to the disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem as a part of the forty-day ministry. It was here, we believe, that they received an endowment. Luke 24 talks about them being told to stay in Jerusalem until they are endowed with power from on high. Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and others commented that Jesus himself gave the disciples during this period basically the equivalent of our temple endowment. The purpose of the Sermon at the Temple is clearly stated in 3 Nephi 15:1, and that is that it is of eschatological importance. If a disciple wishes to be lifted up at the last day and withstand the final day of judgment, he must hear and do and remember these things that Jesus has instructed them this day. If they do they will survive and pass into the presence of God at the final day of judgment. (Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, Semester 4, p.127)

After his days with the disciples, the Savior ascended into heaven. As they stood in awe, staring at the place where he had disappeared, two angels came with a message for them and for all disciples.

Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. (Acts 1:11)

*Why are you standing here staring at heaven. He will return in the same way he departed. In the meantime, there is work to be done. Get on with it. We must not spend our time worrying about his return (staring steadfastly into heaven), but in preparing the world for the time of his return.*

This the disciples begin at once to do. Following the 40-day ministry, the first order of business was to fill up the quorum. Notice who presides at the

meeting in which this matter is considered (Acts 1:15). In Acts 1:21,22, what qualifications must this new apostle meet?

- T** They must have been with the disciples since the baptism of John
- T** They must be a witness of the resurrection. In this context notice the following list of significant scriptures: Acts 1:8; 1:22; 2:24; 2:32; 3:15; 4:1,2; 4:33; 5:32; 5:42; 10:40,41.

Two men were selected for consideration and, after praying to know the will of the Lord in this matter, each of the Twelve gave forth his lot (his vote), and Matthias was chosen (Acts 1:23-26). This pattern is very much like the one followed today as vacancies are filled in the Quorum of the Twelve. In addition, this simple account sends a clear message that it was the intent of the Lord that the quorum remain a quorum of twelve men. It was not a temporary organization designed to end with the death of its members.

## **II. ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST, THE APOSTLES ARE FILLED WITH THE HOLY GHOST (Acts 2)**

You can read about the Feast of Pentecost in the Bible Dictionary, p. 673. Held 50 days after the Feast of Passover, it celebrated the time of harvest. At that time, the disciples were "all with one accord in one place." (Acts 2:1) It was on this day that the promise of Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8, etc. were fulfilled. The Holy Ghost came upon them like cloven tongues of fire "and they were filled with the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:4) What happens next had great implications for the spreading of the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the world, for men, hearing of this strange event, and hearing these disciples speaking in tongues (Acts 2:4) came together in a multitude. (Acts 2:6) They all heard the gospel in their own tongue.

The list of countries represented by these investigators is given in verse 9 and 10. If you note these locations on your Bible maps (perhaps Map 10 is best) you will see that as the gospel began to be preached throughout the world, missionaries would often have found converts waiting for them—families gathered to the fold on the day of Pentecost.

Again, Peter took the lead in explaining and teaching (Acts 2:14), bearing a powerful witness of the mission and resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:31,32), and

3000 new members were added to the fold. We are told that they

- T gladly received the word (2:41)
- T continued steadfastly in the doctrine of the apostles (2:42)
- T continued steadfastly in fellowship (2:42)
- T continued steadfastly in breaking of bread (2:42)
- T continued steadfastly in prayer (2:42)
- T had all things in common (2:44)
- T parted their goods to all men in accordance with need (2:45)
- T continued daily in the temple (2:46)
- T praised God (2:47)

Have our own conversions elicited that same response from us? These seem to be things that we all should be doing in our own lives.

### **III. PETER AND JOHN HEAL A LAME MAN BY THE POWER OF JESUS CHRIST (Acts 3,4)**

The conversion of 3000 at Pentecost must have been a staggering blow to the Sanhedrin. They had hoped that with the death of Christ, this religious stirring among the people would disappear. But worse was yet to come for them. Peter and John were about to enter the temple one afternoon when a 40 year-old beggar, lame from the womb (see 4:22) asked for a handout. Peter, "fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us." Compare this to the experience of Paul in Acts 14:9. Peter and John were looking for faith and they found it. Peter healed the lame man and lifted him up. A man who had never walked, and who had been observed by countless thousands laying by the temple gate, was in an instant leaping and walking and praising God. "All the people saw him walking . . ." (3:9). "They knew" who it was, and they were "filled with wonder and amazement." (3:9,10)

"All the people ran together" (Acts 3:11) to these apostles at Solomon's Porch, and Peter again began to preach.

12 And when Peter saw [it], he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?

13 The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let [him] go.

14 But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;

15 And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.

16 And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

17 And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did [it], as [did] also your rulers.

18 But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord . . .

The Saducees ruled the temple mount, of course, and they, "Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide." (Acts 4:2,3)

But the damage had been done. Acts 4:4 tells us that 5000 men heard the word and believed.

Next morning all the key Jewish figures in the crucifixion of Christ, brought Peter and John in to give an accounting. There might have been a time in the past when Peter would deny any association with Christ to protect himself, but that will never happen again.

7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what

power, or by what name, have ye done this?

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,

9 If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole;

10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, [even] by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

14 And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. (Acts 4:7-14)

Notice the language of 4:13. Peter and John were “unlearned and ignorant men,” who spoke with such power that the leaders of the Jews marveled.

The Lord describes his emissaries as weak, unlearned, and despised. But he promises that through their efforts, He will “thrash the nations by the power of [His] Spirit.” (D&C 35:13) President Hinckley . . . told us of an interview he had with a member of the British Broadcasting Services. The reporter asked... “How do you expect people to listen to these callow youth?” [President Hinckley] pointed out to this reporter that “people do receive them and listen to them. They are wholesome. They are bright, they are alert, they are . . . clean.” (*Ensign*, May '77, p. 78)

Then at the general conference priesthood session held in October of last year, he said, speaking of the missionaries, "They are a miracle . . . They speak out of their hearts, with personal conviction. Each is an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their power comes of faith, and prayer, and humility. (Elder L. Aldin Porter, *The Ensign*, Nov. 1996, p. 9, 10)

#### **IV. THE APOSTLES CONTINUE TO PREACH AND HEAL WITH GREAT POWER (Acts 5)**

The Sunday School Gospel Doctrine Manual does not deal with Acts 5:1-11, but you might, as you read this material, ask yourself what lesson the Lord wanted those early disciples and the Latter-day disciples to learn from that experience. I think it is likely that certain things happened in the Bible with more drama and directness than in our own day because the Lord was teaching lessons, not just for a small congregation, but for the world and the ages. So what does the story of Ananias and Sapphira teach us now?

The continuing success of the apostles caused the High Priest and those that were with him to be "filled with indignation." (Acts 5:17) Every new convert, every miracle, every public discourse was a rebuke to them and their condemnation of the Son of God. Multitudes joined the church. (Acts 5:14) People were hopeful of a healing by the simple passing of the shadow of Peter. The apostles were imprisoned (5:18) and freed by the angel of the Lord. They went directly to the temple and taught again.

Next morning, after finding the jailers unaware of the departure of the apostles and the cells empty, the apostles were brought from the temple to answer charges again. But the leaders were worried now. "They doubted . . . whereunto this would grow," (Acts 5:24) and "they feared the people." (Acts 5:26)

**CONCLUSION:** It seems perfectly clear that a major lesson learned by the twelve following the resurrection and the receipt of the Holy Ghost was this one: "We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29) Regardless of the uncertainty and fear that may have influenced the Twelve in the months before the death of the Savior, those events and the miracles associated with the

resurrection, and the receipt of the Holy Ghost, seem to have erased all doubt and uncertainty. These were now men devoted to their mission. They were to preach Christ regardless of the personal hazards involved. And they did. They had learned what Brigham Young learned: "When the Lord commands the people, let them obey." (Discourses of Brigham Young, p.220)

I pray that I can do the same. I want it known in heaven that I am reliable.

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