

**There are two special features in today's lesson. The first is an analysis of a new focus necessary to make preaching vital again. The second is an analysis of why supernaturalism still hangs on and hangs up our deeper understanding of miracles. Think about it, and let me know what you think. Pastor Bill**

## **TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

### **IHOP BIBLE STUDY**

**# 5 Topic: "Life Together" – with commentary**

**Acts 4: 32 - 37, "The Believers Share Their Possessions;" Acts 5: 1 – 11, "Ananias and Sapphira;" Acts 5: 12 – 16, "The Apostles Heal Many;" Acts 5: 17 – 41, "The Apostle's persecuted;" Acts 6: 1 – 7, "The Choosing of the Seven."**

**The purpose of the Book of Acts** is to record the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Vision and Ministry of Peter and Paul. **Today's study is the 5th of 20 lessons.**

#### **A contextual statement:**

Interestingly, *The Interpreter's Bible* makes the following observation. In the book of Acts, "The Lord is not returned, but in the meantime the word of God is being carried on by the church. The Gentile mission is itself the eschatological action of God." (*The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1971. p. 730.)

This I want to affirm as our perspective. **We will study this book from the perspective of the in-breaking of the Holy Spirit.** This puts us out on the cusp of a deep and foreboding spiritual hole that is eternally deep. The Holy Spirit is that intuited presence within us that urges us to "Jump." "Jump!" To take this leap of faith means to surrender ourselves to the eternal deeps. The discovery, to which I can personally testify, is that this deep, dark, mysterious hole is the place where God lives within us. As we lose control of everything— our-selves, our relationships to neighbor and to God— then we can discover that God really does sustain us. But the experience is like falling, and it is not entirely comfortable. But it works.

Now, to work.

**NOTE:** The context for our study of Acts is on how the influence of the Holy Spirit is experienced. In today's study, this question is the underlying question. How does the Holy Spirit influence the life and work of the Apostles? How is their example important for our life together today?

#### **Read the assigned scripture.**

##### **I. Acts 4: 32 - 37, "The Believers Share Their Possessions"**

**A. Vss. 32 – 35:** List all of the ways the believers shared their possessions.  
**WS: vs. 32:** Of heart and head; not claiming any possessions their own; shared all.  
**Vs. 33:** (All) Testified to resurrection; **vs. 35:** no needy among them; owned land, sold it and brought the money to the Apostles for redistribution to those in need.

**B. Vss. 36, 37:** How do this two verses set up the next section concerning Ananias and Sapphira?

**WS:** The previous verses serve as an introduction to an illustration of the abuse of

the system of equal sharing of all things.

**C.** Reflect on what you've written on how this is the work of the Holy Spirit.  
**WS:** Two contemporary illustrations of Christian community at work: 1) the Christian Insurance program; 2) The board members of the ICA writing checks for their net worth, given to Joe Matthews the E.I./ICA Dean and put into a safe deposit box as a symbol of them selling their net worth in support of the work of the Spirit Movement.

The Holy Spirit always is a SPIRITUAL ALARM CLOCK to awaken us to our need to surrender to God. This is what makes God happy who returns God's sense of deep satisfaction and happiness to us 7-fold.

## II. Acts 5: 1 – 11, "Ananias and Sapphira"

**A.** Briefly describe what happened.  
**WS:** They lied to God, cheated God. The reward for the deed is found in the deed itself. The testing of the Holy Spirit is the unforgivable sin. Because God was us to live awakened, the denial of the Spiritual Alarm Clock is a denial that humans really are awake.

**B.** Vs. 7, Peter identifies this event with the influence of Satan. From the point of view of Gut Trip Analysis, how is this so?  
**WS:** Satan always is experience as a lie, or is personified as The Liar, or the Great Deceiver. Remember Adam and Eve's experience in The Garden. The Demon-Snake lies to the first children that God does not really care if they disobey.

## III. Acts 5: 12 – 16, "The Apostles Heal Many"

**A.** How do the activities described in this section reveal the work of the Holy Spirit?

**For a deeper treatment, please see the supplemental attachment to this study: "Supernaturalism: why it persists."**

**WS:** To understand miracles it is necessary that we suspend our disbelief in them. As we encounter things that do not make rational sense the best approach is to push through them by asking what the lesson is to be learned from them. Recently, the movie "What the *BLINK* do we know?" explored the nature of quantum mechanics. This methods of scientific study approaches the religious dimension in far more depth than most of the "Christian religious" approaches. Quantum mechanics posits the notion of "potentiality," or if it can happen it will! Somehow, I find this concept very helpful when it comes to miracles: I don't understand them, but there is a potentiality for the unusual to happen. My business as a theologian is to push through the physical experience to determine the spiritual revelation. As is indicated in the supplemental attached study on supernaturalism, this approach is based on a world view that is no longer operating, and hasn't operated for 4,000 years. However, its world view still has remnants of influence that are prevalent today.

#### IV. Acts 5: 17 – 41, “The Apostle’s persecuted”

A. The story here concerns the Apostle’s miraculous escape from jail in order to preach in the city square. From the view point of secular- religious understanding, explain what happened here.

**WS:** Again, the supplemental material gives a more elaborate treatment to answer this question. From the point of view of Gut Trip Analysis, this is not a supernatural event; it is a highly spiritual happening that does not have a rational explanation. But this situation does mirror human experience. My role as a Jail Chaplain is to be an angel to roll away the tomb stones preventing the “Full message of God” from being heard! This is what happened here. The important part of this message is eclipsed by the miraculous escape: The Apostle’s returned to the city square to “tell the people the full message of this new life.” This message rolls away tomb stones.

In many ways, the diversion of the so called miracle blinds us to the power of this underlying message. However, another way of looking at this is to note that the miraculous escape demonstrates, or illuminates, the message of new life itself. Now, take your pick.

B. **Vs. 21:** Speculate on why the apostles went out to “teach” instead of to “preach.”

**WS:** This is a personal campaign of mine that supports the useful axiom, “Teach the preach instead of preach the teach.” This is one of the scriptures that are useful to support this axiom. For my first 30 years of preaching, I selected a scripture and then struggled to illuminate the significance of the scriptures through life experience. The emphasis was on life experience. The result was good Christian psychology and sociology. This is what I call “Preaching the teach.” The method was to explore the theme of the scripture.

For the last 14 years of my ministry, my sermon format changed to “teach the preach.” I use the scripture as the format of the sermon itself as a method to explore the meaning of the scripture. The method is to take human experience and name the experience using the scripture.

Part of this shift in preaching style is in response to the times in which we live. There is an apparent hunger to be taught the message of the scripture itself. This is where I identify the weakness of so much preaching today because it still seeks to explore the themes of scripture rather than explore the meaning of the scriptures.

What do you think?

C. **Vss. 31 and 32:** Transliterate this passage using Gut Trip Analysis words. Then, reflect on what you’ve learned.

**WS:** The following is my effort to transliterate this passage:

*The power of Perfect At-One-Ment is supported through our understanding of faith-history, and it is demonstrated through the death of Jesus who is the sacrificial spirit that new life comes by dieing to this world. The one who embodies*

*this demonstration is the same one that the Jewish leaders killed on the Roman cross. However, God took this very human, yet inhumane, event and lifted it up as a deeply spiritual event that is recognized by the worldly (those who recognize Jesus Christ as "Prince") as well as the spiritually awake (those who recognize Jesus Christ as "Savior") as the one that turns life around and pronounces the Good News to Israel. We are witness of these things, and so is the Power of Awakening that we experience as Perfect At-One-Ment. On these things we bet our lives.*

**D. Vss. 33 – 39:** For me, this is the most exciting part of today's study. Re-read the about Gamiliel and his wisdom. How is this a revelation of the Holy Spirit?

**WS:** Gamiliel is awakened to a more humane method of approaching the controversy. The result is to bring about greater harmony, or At-One-Ment which always are signs of the presence of God in our lives.

**E. Vss. 40 – 42:** What happened here, and why is this the work of the Holy Spirit?

**WS:** This is evidence of our need to die to the world in order to be raised into the deeper spiritual awareness. To be "worthy of suffering for **the Name**" represents the awareness that we are privileged to be demonstrations for others. The phrase "the Name" is highlighted because I believe this may be the only place in the Bible that this metaphor, used as a formal Noun, is used for Jesus Christ. A cursory search of my electronic bible supports this conclusion.

**V. Acts 6: 1 – 7, "The Choosing of the Seven"**

**A.** What is going on here, and how does this reveal the work of the Holy Spirit?

**WS:** This is one of the scriptures that support the creation of the two orders of ministry: Deacons (set aside for service), and Elders (set aside for Word, Order, and Sacrament.)

**Alright, folks. Talk to me.**