

# WORSHIP SERVICE - 6.1.2025

## PART 17 - UNSTOPPABLE GOSPEL

### I. INTRODUCTION

- In our passage today, we come to the inevitable moment that had been building up as the apostles, who continued to preach in the name of Jesus and witness to the resurrection, provoked the ire of the religious authorities.
- They are arrested, threatened, beaten, and ordered to keep quiet.
- But their response is echoed in the same defiance of countless other faithful believers through the ages, *"We must obey God rather than men."*
- This is the declaration of every courageous Christian who knows the gospel cannot be stopped.
- We are called to live faithfully in a world that opposes the truth—we can count on opposition.
- Obedience to God often comes at a cost.
- Where do we find the courage the apostles possessed and how can we live with that same unshakeable faith they had while holding fast to the unstoppable gospel?

#### Acts 5:17-21a

But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy 18 they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 20 "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." 21 And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.

### II. SOVEREIGN RESCUE

#### ARREST

- The first instance of opposition to the gospel by the religious authorities resulted in Peter and John being charged not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. They assumed threats would suffice to quash the growing movement.
- But it had no effect. The apostles continued in their preaching and healing mission, teaching in the name of Jesus in Solomon's Portico, and more than ever multitudes were believing and being added to the Lord.
- And it was that continued defiance that provoked the second wave of opposition and attack by the authorities.
- They were angered by the failure of their initial threats and they were filled with jealousy.

- The Greek word used is (zēlos) and denotes not just envy but fervor, zeal and ardor.
- Two biblical stories come to mind.
- First, the jealousy of Joseph's brothers who sold him into slavery.
- Second, Jesus's zeal for his Father's house. (John 2)
- The implication is that the religious rulers were losing control and influence and they had to stop the movement at any cost.
- The Sadducees was a group that held power in the Sanhedrin. They were politically motivated and wanted to keep the peace with the empire. They rejected the resurrection and the miraculous and they were deeply threatened by the apostles' teachings.
- The High Priest and the Sadducees were driven by jealousy. The apostles' growing influence and display of miracles and boldness exposed just how spiritually impotent they were.
- They round up the apostles, not just Peter and John but probably all of the twelve, and they are put in the public jail.
- This was a power play to try to silence the gospel by shaming and confining the apostles.
- Jesus had predicted this would happen.
- Luke 21:12-13 But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. 13 This will be your opportunity to bear witness.
- Opposition to the gospel is inevitable when you boldly live and proclaim the truth.
- Expect it. Embrace it.
- Students, your boldness for Christ may invite ridicule and mockery at school—but stand firm.
- A bold stand for Christ in the workplace will not usually be met with cheers and it will test your allegiance.
- We are all tempted by cultural pressure to conform and feel the pressure to keep quiet.
- The world wants to put us in a prison of sorts to silence the gospel by silencing us.

## JAILBREAK

- Luke quickly recounts the miraculous jail break of the apostles.
- At night, an angel of the Lord drops by and unlocks the prison doors and leads them out.
- He gives them very specific instructions to return to the exact place the conflict began—and to do the very thing that is provoking the jealousy of the religious authorities.
- *“Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.”*
- This is the first time Luke describes the gospel message as the words of this life.
- The gospel is the words of this life.
- Jesus is called the Author of life in Acts 3:15
- When the gospel first goes to the Gentiles, the apostles recognize that God has also granted to them repentance that leads to life. (Acts 11:18)
- Paul and Barnabas proclaim the word of the Lord in Antioch in Pisidia and the Gentiles receive the gospel, rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48)
- That's what the gospel message is: Life to those who receive and believe it.
- You are a herald of the words of this life! Openly and boldly proclaim the message!

- The apostles are freed from prison not for their comfort and safety but for the furtherance of Christ's mission.
- The apostles went back the very next morning and began to teach.
- Despite the risks, knowing the cost, they boldly proclaim Christ.
- We see God's sovereignty shine in this miraculous deliverance.
- Whatever man has designed to thwart the spread of the gospel, God's power overrules.
- When opposed, we need to trust God's providence in the midst of opposition.
- We need to trust God's sovereign power and providence to sustain and preserve us.
- We need to trust that God is with us.
- He orchestrates all events for His glory and His people's good (Romans 8:28).
- And He is not bound by prison or politics, his will cannot be thwarted by the mightiest emperor or nation—He rules over all.

### III. BOLD OBEDIENCE

- The second half of v21 through v26 Luke demonstrates the ineptitude of the temple authorities in their attempt to control events and silence the apostles.
- The high priest convenes the entire council of the Sanhedrin and sends for the prisoners to appear before them.
- The officers head to the prison, and discover the empty cell, and they come back and report that all of the men are gone.
- They are all baffled and bewildered by the news. As they are pondering this, someone runs into the chamber and tells them, *"Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people."*
- They're doing exactly what made them mad and jealous in the first place.
- V26 The captain of the temple guard goes out and has the apostles brought back, but not by force. They are afraid of being stoned by the people.
- The apostles find themselves again before the council but they have not been immobilized or silenced.

#### Acts 5:27-32

And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "**We must obey God rather than men.**" 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

- The anger and frustration of the high priest and the rulers is palpable.
- They had strictly charged the apostles not to preach or teach in this name—they can't bring themselves to even say His name.
- They make the claim that all of Jerusalem has been filled with this teaching.
- But the high priest is also concerned that the preaching of Christ exposes their guilt and complicity in Christ's death.

- They are concerned with their reputation and popularity and maintaining influence over the people.
- As Peter has done before he preaches a bold mini-sermonette.
- They declare their obedience to God is non-negotiable.
- *"We must obey God rather than men!"*
- Peter doesn't water down the message and preaches Christ crucified, raised, exalted, and the offer of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
- He charges the religious leaders with their part—"whom you killed by hangin on a tree."
- They killed him—but God, in his faithfulness, raised him up!
- Moreover, God exalted him at his right hand as Ruler and Savior. He is the King of glory.

- The arrogance and foolishness of the religious authorities thinking that they could stamp out Christ and this movement but all they did by killing Jesus was to further it.
- 1 Corinthians 2:9 None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

- Now Jesus, from his supreme position of honor and power, is able to give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.
- That's the good news of the message they are proclaiming. That is the essence of the gospel.
- There is forgiveness of sins in Christ.
- 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,
- And because he was resurrected, those who trust in him, will also be resurrected on that glorious Day to life everlasting.
- Christ not only offers hope for this life—but also for the one to come.

- Lastly, the apostles reiterate their purpose—they are witnesses to the resurrection.
- They are called to bear witness to what they have seen.
- But not only them—the Holy Spirit also bears witness to this truth of the resurrection of Jesus.
- V32 "...and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."
- The trinitarian nature of Peter's message is hard to miss.
- The religious leaders are not opposing just men in some fledgling underground movement—they are opposing the very God they claim to know and serve.
- Notice how the mini-sermon begins and ends with a reference to obedience to God.
- The people of God are under obligation to obey God even though that may set them at odds with human authorities and they may suffer at their hands.
- The apostles' allegiance is to God, not human authorities.
- Our ultimate allegiance is not to king or country, presidents or earthly rulers, it is to the Sovereign God, it is to Christ the King of kings and Lord of lords.

- Scripture does teach that we are to submit to those who are in authority.
- All authority is established by God. But we only submit to those authorities provided they do not contradict God's Word.
- When the state or a human authority forbids what God requires or sanctions what God forbids, we obey God rather than men.

- If you live boldly for Christ, if you stand firm in the truths of God's Word, if you faithfully proclaim the true gospel, your allegiance to God will be tested.
  - Obedience to God will put you at odds with the world.
  - It could put you at risk of losing a promotion when you refuse to compromise the truth.
  - It could lose you clients and contracts.
  - It will cost you friendships and relationships.
  - It may mark you for cancellation.
  - You may find yourself opposed by powerful and influential people.
  - But our allegiance must always be to God and not human authorities.
  - Don't waste the opportunity even in the face of persecution. Speak the truth boldly!
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- Christianity will always be opposed. The gospel message will always be offensive to some.
  - But the gospel is unstoppable because the God of the gospel is unstoppable.
  - Crushing persecution has not stopped the forward progress of the gospel in the world and it has not destroyed the Church of Jesus Christ.
  - Christianity is a resistance movement.
  - The politics of the world will clash with the kingdom of God. They are kingdoms in conflict.
  - Friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God. (James 4:4)
  - Obedience and Allegiance to God above all else!

## IV. JOYFUL SUFFERING

### PROVIDENCE

- At hearing Peter's message, the council is enraged. They wanted to have these men put to death.
  - And they would have gotten what they wished for had it not been for one of the Pharisees named Gamaliel, who sought to temper the heightened emotions and offered some sound counsel and common sense. You can read that in vv33-40
  - Gamaliel, was a teacher of the law and highly respected by many.
  - We find out later in Acts, that he was Paul's teacher (Acts 22:3).
  - Gamaliel has the apostles put outside so that they can confer in private.
  - He takes charge of the meeting and begins with a warning and then argues for restraint.
  - V35 And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men."
  - He proceeds to give two examples of resistance movements that cropped up in more recent history.
  - Theudas and Judas the Galilean are the names mentioned as leaders of these movements.
  - Both of these men rose up claiming to be somebody, they gathered a following, they were killed, their followers were dispersed and scattered, and their movements came to nothing.
  - Now there is a big difference between them and Jesus that seems to escape even the very learned and educated Gamaliel, after those two men's deaths, their followers dispersed. But Jesus' followers continue to gather and their numbers grow because he is alive again!
  - The resurrection changes everything!
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- He concludes that they need to stay away from these men and leave them alone.

- The basis for this advice comes from two likely scenarios.
- If the plan is of human origin, it will fail. Just like it did with the other two.
- But, if the plan is of God, there is nothing the temple authorities can do to overthrow them.
- He adds one final important note: they need to consider the possibility that they could actually be opposing and resisting God.
- They will be found to be "God-fighters," that's what everyone who opposes God is.
- Luke displays the irony of the situation and demonstrates God's providence in using the enemies of truth to further the message of truth.
- The council is persuaded by Gamaliel's words, they take his advice, they summon the apostles back to the chamber, they beat them, they charge them again not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then they release them.
- But God's plans will not be halted, even though believers suffer.

## REJOICING

Acts 5:41-42 Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

- The last two verses detail the apostles' reactions upon release and the actions they take.
- They had just been beaten yet they are rejoicing!
- And what reason do they give for their rejoicing?
- That they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.
- They had the honor of being dishonored for Christ.
- To suffer for Christ is not shameful, it is not a disgrace, it is an honor
- Matthew 5:10-12 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
- Their witness did not waver, both publicly and privately, they continue to proclaim Christ.
- Following Jesus may cost you friendships and opportunities—rejoice and be glad!
- Faithfully and boldly stand for Jesus and you may be mocked, intimidated, and shamed but you're in good company!
- We are in the company of the apostles!
- We are in the company of our suffering Savior.
- Christians can suffer and take a beating with joy because he suffered in our place and took the ultimate beating for us.
- And he was raised from the dead, and he is presently seated in the place of all authority, rule and dominion.
- The devil has not given up his attempt to destroy the church and hinder the progress of the gospel.
- But the church of Jesus Christ is still here! It has survived the fiercest and most violent of persecutions.
- It has outlasted the cruelest of emperors and kings.
- Take courage, follower of Jesus, the gospel cannot be silenced, it is unstoppable, and we must never retreat from our calling:
- To stand boldly for Christ.
- To speak faithfully the truth of God's Word.

- To suffer joyfully for the sake of his name.
- We must Obey God rather than men, trusting him to sustain us, and that we will be counted worthy to suffer for His name.
- Step out in faith this week. Ask God for one opportunity this week, through a conversation, maybe through an opportunity to pray for someone or through an act of service, and boldly share the words of this life for the glory of our great King.

## **APPLICATION AND REFLECTION**

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?