

1) INTRO

- This morning we continue our walk through the book of Acts
- And, as we do so, we come on the heels of where we were last week in looking at the seriousness of hypocrisy and it’s offensiveness to God
 - We saw that hypocrisy can seep into our lives if we’re not constantly living with hearts that’re looking to Christ, resting in the HS, and living in submission to God
 - We saw that we’re to live lives that’re aware of the holiness of God and our sin before him
 - We saw that fear of God’s a good thing
 - It’s good for our souls to know that b/c of our sin we’re never to think we’re something special or that we’re living perfect lives that’re free of sin
 - We were shown clearly that blatant sin against God’s an absolute abomination to him
 - B/c God’s a holy God and b/c we’re sinful people, God can choose to strike us dead for our sin anytime he wants
 - Simply b/c he’s God...who’s sovereign over all
 - And b/c he’s God and sovereign over all, we’ll fall on our faces before him in worship knowing that the reason we’re still alive right now’s b/c of his grace
 - And, b/c he’s God and sovereign over all, he’s given us JC to atone for our sinful, wicked hearts
 - JC paid the penalty by dying in our place
 - And, we praise God for that
- And, so that’s where we left off last week
 - Knowing that our holy and righteous God hates sin
 - And, knowing that we’re not to live to exalt ourselves...but we’re to live exalt God...we’re to run from the sin of hypocrisy
 - So, we left with v11 showing us that “great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things” ...i.e. the seriousness of God’s dealing with sin
- This is the backdrop of the weightiness that people’re feeling in our text today
 - And, it’s in this vein that our passage continues today

2) vv12-16

- These verses show us the signs and wonders that continue to take place
 - God’s supernatural work continues to be seen and known and worked through the apostles
 - God continues to use his people to make his power known among the people here
 - So, people were continuing to feel and know the powerful effects of the church as God was continuing to work in dramatic ways in healing people and revealing himself as God
 - And, we see in our text that God’s working in these ways to draw others to himself
- These verses also show us how the church continues to grow and expand
 - What’s remarkable here’s that the church’s growing and expanding and thriving even though great fear’s upon everyone
 - As people’re continuing to hear and reflect on the work of God in striking down and killing Ananias and Sapphira, God’s still growing his church
 - Even though there’s great fear among everyone – even to the point where no one dared to join the church (v13) – “more than ever believers were added to the Lord” v14

- The church continues to grow dramatically
- And, we see that it's growing more than ever!
 - This is remarkable when we think of what we've seen already
 - Acts 2:41 – 3,000 in one day
 - Acts 4:4 – the number of men who came to believe grew to about 5,000
 - So, even in spite of what we might consider an obstacle to the gospel – that is, the deadly judgment of God – many people heard the gospel, gladly believed it, and joined the church
 - And, we see here that multitudes of men *and women* were being added to the family of God
- So, we see that even though many people began to fear God b/c of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira by our holy God, even that didn't diminish the effectiveness of the apostles or the growth of the church
- This is what we see right away – and throughout the rest of our text today – that the Gospel continues to grow no matter what
 - God wants to show us that his desire's for the Gospel to triumph and progress and advance even in the midst of what we might see as less than ideal circumstances
 - God's judgment just came down on Ananias and Sapphira – and people knew of it – but, the Gospel continues to expand
 - And, the Gospel continues to expand even in spite of what our limited, human minds see as obstacles or adversities or struggles
 - God's faithful in changing and transforming the hearts and lives of those who're his children
- Our powerful and mighty and saving God will save those who belong to him
 - And, this is such great encouragement for us
 - First, b/c God's saved us
 - He's changed our hearts and given us new hearts that beat for him and love him
 - And, it's also encouraging as we think of those we've no doubt spent much time in prayer over their souls
 - Think of the people you've spent time praying for...for their salvation...maybe even for years
 - Sons, daughters, wives, husbands, fathers, mothers, aunts, uncles, grandmothers, grandfathers, coworkers, classmates, neighbors
 - Regardless of the circumstances or obstacles or even their resistance to the Gospel, God will save them if their his
 - God's powerful enough to break through hardened sinful hearts
 - He did that in those of us who love him and live for him now
 - And, he can do that for that person in your mind right now too
 - In spite of the obstacles or struggles you're facing or they're facing...God can do that
 - We're called to be faithful to God's call to share the Good News of JC
- We see this faithfulness in our text
- Even though there was great fear among the people b/c of what we saw last week, the apostles kept on trucking...they continued to be faithful in the mission of bringing the Gospel and making disciples
 - NT Scholar Ajith Fernando – “the church did not lower its standards in order to win the lost.”
 - What a good word for us, amen!

- In a culture that's increasingly intolerant of Christ and Christians and Christianity and Biblical standards, may we look to our brothers and sisters in the early church for encouragement
 - Our God's the same as the God in the book of Acts
 - We're people who filled with the power of the HS
 - And, he enables us to obediently and faithfully and boldly shine for Jesus and live for Jesus
 - This is what the apostles were doing in our passage today...in the midst of opposition and obstacles
 - May the HS help us to not lower our standards in reaching the lost as well!
 - May he help us to be faithful to our God!
 - As we continue on with our text now, we'll see how Peter and the apostles were faithful to God in shining for Christ

3) vv17-25

- So, the Gospel attracts some and repels others, doesn't it?
 - While it attracted many and God worked in many hearts and lives in vv12-16, we see here where the gospel also angers some
- And, the opposition and obstacles before the apostles aren't just in terms of the fear that fell on everyone over the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira
 - But, they also face direct opposition from the Jewish leaders of the day
 - And, we see in our passage that the Jewish leaders – the high priest and the Sadducees – were opposing the apostles b/c they were jealous (v17)
 - Now, the Sadducees didn't believe in miracles, the supernatural...didn't believe in angels and especially didn't believe in the resurrection
 - But, they were the group in power...they were the leaders
 - And, the church was growing rapidly and greatly...even as the demands of commitment and responsibility to a holy God were evident to all
 - The power of God was clearly at work in drawing many people to Christ
- And, now the power players of the day – the high priest and the Sadducees – they realized they were losing their power
 - So, their jealousy over the power and attention that God and the church and the apostles were receiving caused them to arrest the apostles and throw them in prison
 - But, their plan didn't work
 - An angel comes to free the apostles from prison
 - But, the angel doesn't just free them from prison and tell them to run to safety
 - He tells them to get back to the temple and tell everyone there about the life and salvation that Jesus has given us
- So, they did
 - The apostles obeyed
 - They were obedient to the mission of God no matter the cost
 - They were arrested for shining for Christ and proclaiming the Gospel message of salvation
 - And, here they're freed from prison and told to go right to the temple to preach the same message that put them in prison on the first place!
 - They're commissioned to go and do the very same thing that threw them in prison
 - This word from the angel to continue on in mission's a good word for us

- It's a good word for us b/c we all need constant encouragement in this
- In the midst of struggle and opposition, it can be easy to lose our passion/desire/energy to share the good news that JC has come to save sinners like us
- It can be easy to lose focus or to lose energy or to lose a passion for the lost
- But, God encourages us to continue on in mission
 - Here he uses the angel to encourage the apostles
 - God can use those same means for us if he chooses, he can use other people to encourage us in this, he uses the Bible for sure to help encourage us in this
- May we feel encouraged in this regard this morning too
 - God's encouraging us here in his Word – in these vv – to be persistent to continually point others to life and salvation in JC
 - We see that the apostles obeyed God's word from the angel to continue in preaching the Gospel
 - And, the same HS that empowered them to obey God, also helps us to obey God as well
 - May we obey God in this regard just as the apostles do here
- We see they were doing exactly as they were commissioned in our text when, the next day, the Jewish leaders – the Sanhedrin – were gathered together to bring them trial
 - But, when they went to bring them out of prison to the trial, they weren't there
 - Instead, they were in the temple and teaching the people there as they were encouraged to continue on in

4) vv26-32

- The obstacles and opposition the apostles face heighten here as they're arrested again, reprimanded for their disobedience to the orders of the Jewish leaders, and pressed to explain their actions
- And, in response, Peter and the apostles don't try to plead for their release or their innocence
- Instead, they respond by proclaiming the Gospel...by speaking "the words of this Life" as God commanded in v20
 - They respond first by committing their allegiance and obedience to God over and above their obedience to men
 - As we look at this in conjunction with Romans 13, we're shown here that we submit to and obey the authority God's placed over us until that authority would cause us to disobey God
 - It's at that point where we obey God
 - This is what Peter and the apostles are living out
 - The leaders were doing anything they could try to do to stop the apostles from proclaiming life and salvation in Christ
 - They were living in obedience to Christ
 - May the HS challenge us and encourage us in this as well
 - In 2016, we're faced with many political, social, religious, economic ideas and agenda that seek to stifle Christians and our Gospel witness
 - We're constantly pushed in our day in the areas of sexuality, gender, and racial issues
 - To stand for Christ and the Gospel bears with it the prejudice and anger that others are gonna feel toward us
 - To live for Jesus and live out gospel-transformed lives that seek to glorify and obey and honor God...it's gonna be tough sometimes

- We're to hate sin and uphold the holiness of God
- It's not always gonna be easy; it wasn't meant to be easy, but we're called to be faithful to God in shining for him
 - Which is what the apostles do here
- After responding by first committing their allegiance to God, they launch into clearly speaking the truth of the Gospel
 - Peter and the apostles know that more important than their own security, more important than their own sense of freedom from the council is people's souls
 - Even in the midst of being put in prison/being put to public shame, they know that the souls of those who're there are what's important
 - Their soft hearts to the HS and their soft hearts for those who're dying without Christ drive them to use this difficult circumstance to clearly preach the Gospel and faithfully live out the great commission to be God's witnesses to every corner of the earth
 - So, they point to Jesus who was killed on the cross
 - They point out that God raised him from the dead...they proclaim his resurrection
 - They point to the reality that Jesus is seated in heaven with God the father right now
 - They make it clear that salvation requires repentance and that God grants forgiveness of sins in Jesus
 - They show that we're now given the HS when we trust in the truth of this/the truth of who Christ is
 - They make the most of this difficult circumstance that they're walking through by faithfully pointing to Jesus who's our Savior and Lord and Leader
 - And, so the Jewish leaders go right along with it
 - Not quite...they become enraged

5) vv33-42

- At the proclamation of the Gospel, the Sanhedrin's furious...to the point where they wanted to kill them
- But, the Pharisee Gamaliel stands up and speaks up
 - Gamaliel was one of the most famous rabbis of his time
 - He was the grandson of the prominent rabbi Hillel
 - Gamaliel led the liberal faction of the Pharisees and was known for his easygoing interpretation of the law
 - He was the teacher of Paul...before he was Paul/when he was Saul
 - And, Gamaliel convinces them to not kill the apostles
 - He does so by mentioning to other cases where the results turned in their favor...where there wasn't an uprising against them
 - The miracles that were taking place, including the escape from prison seemed to make Gamaliel question whether this new movement might actually be of God
 - We see this come forth in v39 when he warns that they don't want to be found opposing God
 - God sovereignly works out his plans and purposes through unlikely people, doesn't he?
 - This was actually common Pharisical thinking...it was commonplace for the Pharisees to hold tightly to the fact that God's will would always overrule men's will
 - So, to be on the safe side...Gamaliel convinces them not to kill the apostles
- So, they decided to beat them instead

- They brought them in, beat them, and told them not to speak of JC and salvation in him anymore
- The opposition the apostles faced grew even more here to the point of being beaten for Christ
- They were likely whipped with 39 lashes so that they didn't go over the OT limit of 40 lashes
- But, the opposition they faced and the beating they just endured didn't slow them down/it didn't discourage them/it didn't crush them...instead, it gave them exuberant joy to continue making JC known
 - The apostles left the beating "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name"
 - What was meant to be shameful and dishonoring, they counted as a great honor!
 - The believed Jesus' words from Matthew 5:10 – "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"
 - It's a joy to suffer for Jesus' name...it's a great privilege and a great honor to be considered worthy to suffer for Christ
 - It's an honor to be living for Jesus in such a way that others see that...that people see Jesus
 - It's an honor to suffer for Christ
 - This is a major theme that's woven throughout the book of Acts: that suffering for Christ's an honor that causes much joy
 - In John 15:20, Jesus said that "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you"
 - It's a joy to suffer with Christ...it *should* be a joy for us to suffer with Christ, anyway
 - And, this is hard for us grasp onto though, isn't it?
 - Especially b/c we're people who do anything to avoid suffering
 - We try to work things out so that we won't suffer
 - But...may we be transformed by the Spirit so much so that we'll find it an honor to suffer for the name of Christ
 - May we give us eyes and hearts that see things through his lenses rather than our own natural inclinations so that we'd say with the disciples that it's an honor to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ

6) CONCLUSION

- May we know the honor of suffering for Christ, amen?
 - God's not just giving this to us as a simple historic account or for its shock value
 - The same Spirit who gave Peter and the apostles joy in suffering for Christ can give us joy when others pick on us or persecute us or beat us or torture us for Christ
 - This is for us
 - This is for us to grow our desire to constantly and consistently be witnesses to our Savior, JC...even when things are tough
 - So, let's be living this way!
 - Let's look at every opportunity as an opportunity to share Jesus
 - Let's speak to others of repentance and forgiveness of sin in JC
 - May the HS help us pay attention to opportunities that come up where we can share Christ with the cashier at the grocery store or the teller at the bank or the guy who pumps our gas or the JW who knocks on the door?
 - May we be aware
 - May we be "incessantly involved in evangelism"
 - Even when there's opposition

- Obstacles didn't slow Peter and the apostles from making Jesus known...obstacles and opposition shouldn't slow us down either
 - May we faithfully proclaim the Gospel of life in Christ
 - Even though we'll face resistance
 - Even though people will hate us and maybe even hurt us
 - May we faithfully point...
 - Point Albern to Christ
 - our families to Christ
 - our friends to Christ
 - our neighbors to Christ
 - our coworkers to Christ
 - our classmates to Christ
- May God help each one of us to be "incessant evangelists"
 - There's nothing better that we can give to the world

2016-10-30

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