

In our passage last time we read the account of Ananias and Sapphira. This couple sold a piece of property, and with great fanfare, presented an offering to the church, claiming that they had given all of the money they received from the sale. In reality, they only gave a portion of the proceeds, and thus tried to deceive the church, in order to appear to be more pious, and holy, than they really were. Peter told them that they had not lied to men, but to God. They had put the Holy Spirit to the test, trying to see how much they could get away with before God judged them. God struck them and they both died, because of their sin, in order to protect the spiritual integrity of His church.

Twice in this account, the bible says that great fear seized first the whole church, and then everyone who heard about what happened. There was, among the people, a holy fear of God. No one wanted to lie to God for fear of judgment. They instead wanted to live in His grace, and in the sphere of His Holy Spirit. As we will see in our passage of scripture this evening, this bound the people of the church together as the Apostles continued the work of God to spread the gospel. Those outside of the church were in awe, and as the gospel continued to spread, the church continued to grow. As we continue our study, let's see what lessons God has for the church today in Acts 5:12-21a.

Back in chapter two, Luke said that the Apostles did many wonders and miraculous signs that accompanied their witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. In chapter three, he gave one example when Peter healed a man who had been crippled from birth. Here, in verse 12, he repeats the fact that the Apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people.

Remember that Jesus told His disciples that they would do even greater things than what He had been doing. Here we get an indication that Jesus' words were fulfilled as the gospel spread. Notice also that the Apostles alone are mentioned here as performing these signs and wonders. There is no indication in this text that the other believers in the church had the power or authority to do these things. Steven, in chapter six, Phillip, in chapter eight, and Paul and Barnabas in chapter fourteen, are also mentioned as individuals who performed signs and wonders, but no one else.

The question that sometimes arises is whether or not God uses people to perform signs and wonders today. On our television sets we see preachers who claim to have a healing ministry. We see them lay their hands on someone, and claim healing in Jesus' name. Sometimes they offer a nebulous prayer over the television, for some unnamed person who has a physical need, and pronounce healing without any accountability, or any way of confirming that God has healed that person, so we wonder if this might be some elaborate show, meant to deceive viewers, for the purpose of raising money. Often when these preachers pronounce healing, but the healing does not take place, they blame the person who has been suffering for not having enough faith.

On the other hand, we know that God is still in the miracle business today. There is a sense in which many doctors, nurses, and other medical personnel have a gift of healing. When we pray in the Spirit, and in the name of Jesus, often God answers our prayers, and we see His miraculous power in the lives and circumstance of the people we pray for.

I confess that I am skeptical of faith healers who claim that they can pronounce miracles in Jesus name, but I also recognize that all things are possible with God. The bible says that in the last days, God will pour out His Spirit. If we are in the last days, I suspect we might see more miraculous signs in the days ahead. As far as the book of Acts is concerned, God choose certain

people of faith, to be able to perform signs and wonders, in order to advance the gospel in the early stages of the Christian church.

In the second half of verse 12, Luke again says that the people of the early church met together in Solomon's Colonnade. There were now thousands of believers, more people than could physically fit in Solomon's Colonnade, so the text indicates that all who were able to attend at any given time would meet up in the temple, in Solomon's Colonnade. To make it relevant to our situation, we never have all of our members together on one occasion. On the official church role we have 1,600 members, but we have 400 to 500 who attend on any given Sunday. Many of these people who are on the church role are inactive, non-resident, or over the years have moved on without ever moving their letter. Even among the most faithful members, circumstances make it impossible for many to be here every Sunday.

Still the text suggests it was a very large congregation, which made an unmistakable presence in the temple. Everyone who went to the temple for worship, or prayer, would see, and recognize, that the people in this group were followers of Jesus Christ.

Verse 13 tells us that no one dared to join them. This indicates that none of the Jewish non-believers, at the temple, dared to join them. Why wouldn't they go over and listen to the teachings of the Apostles? Why wouldn't they enter the group out of curiosity? In part, for the same reasons people do not attend church today. I have shared the gospel with people who were so oppressed and depressed that they were holding on by a thread. Even with the great promise and hope of the gospel, they resist God's love. They are able to cope with their current situation, but fear any change at all might send them over the edge. People, who are lost, by the nature of their flesh, do not want to feel conviction over sin, and their lack of faith. In our previous passage, the bible tells us that everyone who heard about what happened to Ananias and Sapphira were seized with great fear. Often people are afraid that if they come to church they are going to be made to feel guilty and they will have to change their lives in some way, otherwise they will be hypocrites. This is a valid fear because when a sinner is confronted with the gospel, there is a call to repentance and faith. Jesus said, in order to have eternal life, you must be born again.

In spite of the unbeliever's hesitation at the temple, the gospel continued to spread rapidly, and people were being added to their number, daily. As a result of their faith, and the demonstration of the Spirit's power, the people began to bring the sick, and the demon possessed, to be healed by the Apostles. Through miraculous signs, God confirmed His word among the people of the early church, and the gospel continued to spread rapidly.

Verse 15 says that some of the people thought that a person could be healed if Peter's shadow fell on them. This verse reminds us of those who thought that if they could just touch the hem of Jesus' garment, that they would be healed. Jesus taught that it was not such superstition that healed a person; rather it was their faith.

As word spread to the outlying towns, great crowds of people gathered in Jerusalem in order that people with every kind of infirmity might be healed, and the bible says that all of them received healing. God was moving powerfully. People were getting saved. God healed the sick and cast out demons. So, does God work in that way today?

I believe with all of my heart that God can work in the same way today, and He does in some instances, but the church at large is not as fervent in its faith as it was in the beginning. The church has become a watered down version of what it was at its inception. There is too much compromise on the principles of God's word, and many have lost the fear of the Lord. Faith

wanes in the light of a lack of a demonstration of the Spirit's power, but people lack the Spirit's power because of their lack of faith, and commitment to God's revealed will.

Beginning in verse 17 we see reaction to this mighty movement of God. The high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. God moved in power through the Apostles, but the Sadducees were becoming powerless. The people were turning to faith in Jesus Christ, under the ministry of the Apostles, but they were turning away from the ministry of the Sadducees. The high priest, and his crew, was used to having all the power and authority among the people, and they were losing it. If the people turned to faith in Jesus, and moved away from Jewish tradition and temple worship, they could lose a large portion of their income from their lucrative temple business. Power, authority, position, prestige, and income were all at risk, and the Sadducee wanted the people to continue to honor them, instead of the Apostles.

There is no place for jealousy within the church. One church, or one congregation, should not be jealous of another. One member should not be jealous of another's gifts, or ministry. We should pray for one another, and praise God for everything that happens to advance His kingdom. We must learn to be content with God's revealed purpose for our lives, and encourage one another in whatever role God determines for each individual. Otherwise, jealousy will become the tool of Satan to disrupt what God would do in our midst.

But the context, the jealousy, in this passage of scripture, comes from the religious leaders outside of the church. Pious, self-righteous religious leaders, at the top of the religious world, were opposing God's will, and the movement of the Holy Spirit. We see the same kind of opposition in our world today through papal decrees, and the opposition that comes from cult religions, and special interest groups throughout the world.

In the case of our text, those in power threw the apostles in public jail. In the case of our culture, those who stand upon the principles of God's word, and refuse to surrender to political correctness, face ridicule, dismissal and persecution. In other parts of the world, Christians are imprisoned, tortured, or beheaded for their faith. I fear that such opposition will only get worse as we approach the day of the Lord's return.

When verse 18 says that they arrested the apostles, it suggests that all of the apostles went to jail. But, God was not finished using them in His work to build His church. An angel of the Lord set the apostles free, and instructed them to go stand in the temple courts and tell the people the full message of this new life, and that is exactly what they did.

Let's put ourselves in the apostle's shoes. Being thrown into jail would be pretty scary. Being delivered from jail by an angel of the Lord would certainly give us reason to have confidence to do what God revealed He wanted us to do, but the opponents who threw us in jail would still pose a great threat. Whenever we face opposition to our faith, or to carrying out God's revealed will, we have to trust God that He will deliver us, and see us through. We also know that the opposition is probably not going to just go away. I don't think that the apostles proceeded without some measure of fear. Likewise, when we move outside of our comfort zone, it is usually accompanied by a measure of fear. The question we have to ask ourselves is, which is greater, my fear of rejection, ridicule, and persecution, from the lost world, or my fear that I might let down or displease my Lord. Which is more important, to do the revealed will of God, in spite of my fear, or to retreat to the relative safety of my comfort zone, and accomplish nothing for the kingdom of God.

Mature Christians experience God's hand in their lives when they are obedient to His revealed will, and that builds confidence and faith, but it may not totally remove the fear. Victory

comes for us when we move beyond our fear, and do whatever God says for us to do. What God tells me specifically to do, may not be exactly what He tells you to do, but there is one thing that is in common for all of us. We are to tell the people the full message of this new life.

I was once lost in my sin, and separated from God, but I confessed and repented of my sin. I trusted Jesus as my Lord and Savior, and now I know that God has forgiven me of my sin. He is with me, always, in the person of His Holy Spirit. My life has changed, and is so much better than it used to be. God has given me new meaning and purpose.

Jesus was God in the flesh. He came for the purpose of taking away the penalty for sin. He sacrificed Himself for you and me, died on the cross, and arose from the grave. He is coming again. The good news of the gospel is that God loves you, and wants to save you. Even now His arms are open to receive you as His child, to forgive you of your sins, and give you eternal life.

If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. You will be sealed with His Holy Spirit, and be born again spiritually. Jesus will bring new meaning and purpose to your life. Is there any reason why anyone here, who has not already surrendered his or her life in faith, could not pray to receive Jesus right now?