

“Mission: Unstoppable”

Acts 5:17-42

Acts: The Unstoppable Gospel

I. INTRODUCTION

2 Timothy 3:12 – “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

315 million Christians today face “very high” or “extreme” levels of persecution (Open Doors).

II. THE TEXT

Acts 5:14 – “all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number.”

Failing to corrupt the church from within (Acts 5:1-11); Satan attacks the church from without.

Scene 1: The Apostles Arrested

The apostles were not arrested for breaking the law, but because the Sadducees were “filled with jealousy.”

John 18:10 – “Simon Peter then, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear.”

The apostles, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, trusted God enough to submit to arrest and imprisonment.

Scene 2: Jailbreak!

There are at least five points in Acts where one or more apostles are imprisoned; in none of them do they try to escape.

Romans 13:1 – “Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”

“About daybreak:” a bad night of sleep is no excuse for not serving the Lord.

Scene 3: Where’d They Go?

Luke includes this scene because, quite honestly, it’s hilarious. The Sanhedrin are “greatly perplexed” (v. 24).

Scene 4: The Interrogation

“We must obey God rather than men:” Obedience to God takes priority over commands from any other authority (v. 29).

Peter has gone from denying Jesus three times (Luke 22:54-62) to preaching the gospel to the men who killed Him.

Scene 5: Enter Gamaliel

Gamaliel was a Pharisee and the teacher of the apostle Paul (Acts 22:3).

Gamaliel’s principle: “for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them” (vv. 38-39).

The central question of the text: is this new Jesus movement of man... or of God?

Scene 6: The Apostles Persevere

The apostles rejoiced at the opportunity to suffer for Jesus... a marked change from before the Resurrection.

Matthew 26:31 – “Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, ‘I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.’”

III. PRINCIPLES

Gamaliel’s principle at work (vv. 38-39): the Sanhedrin’s plan and action is of man, and it fails; the apostles’ actions are of God, and they cannot be stopped.

The gospel movement will continue, even in the face of opposition, because it is God’s movement.

1. If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)

Psalm 118:6 – “The Lord is for me; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”

All the forces arrayed against the gospel across the world are a tiny fraction of the power of Almighty God.

2. God will accomplish all His purpose: “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure’” (Isaiah 46:10).

Revelation 7:9 – “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands.”

The unstoppable gospel at work: the story of Jim Elliott (*Through Gates of Splendor*)

3. Take courage; Christ has overcome the world: “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Matthew 5:11-12 – “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

IV. APPLICATION

For believers: **will we continue to share the gospel in the face of opposition?** (Each One Win One)

For skeptics: **is the gospel movement of man... or of God?**

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

1. What is your response to seeing maps like the World Watch List? How do you feel about the promise that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12)?
2. One of the most remarkable features of this passage is the apostles’ transformation in the short time since Jesus’ death and resurrection. How have you seen the Holy Spirit transform your life or the life of someone you know? Why do you think there’s such a gap between what Christians claim to believe about money and their actual giving practices?
3. When we encounter opposition or persecution as Christians, what are some principles from God’s Word that give us hope?
4. What is one way this week that you can share the unstoppable gospel with greater courage and boldness?