

Leadership Unleashed (Acts 5:17-42)

This morning – we will cover the second half of Acts 5. And we're going to read about leaders who are courageous in the face of opposition.

And here's why – they were fueled by the resurrection.

They were repeatedly told, "Don't speak about the resurrection." And yet despite being told, they talked about the resurrection again and again. They said, "We cannot keep from speaking about the things we have seen and heard." And so they just keep on preaching the Word.

And so in chapter 5, we have an example of what it looks like when UNLEASHED LEADERS move out into the world.

And what we see first is – resurrection power means wherever I find myself today, whatever I'm facing,

My Condition is Not Hopeless

Acts 5:12 - The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people.

A few verses later (**verse 16**) – Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and **all of them** were healed.

And so we see, that when you live in the power of the risen Christ, the things that are no longer - have to stay that way.

The open tomb has opened up possibilities to break the power of status quo.

And that's **why** the church DID, **why** the church DOES, and **why** the church always WILL believe in the healing power of Jesus.

Because when people are healed, they become a testimony to the world that the resurrection power has come.

I know not everyone who prays to Jesus gets healed. I can show you people in the New Testament that did not.

Apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 12 talks about his thorn in the flesh, and he prayed three times that the Lord would take it away, and God said, "My grace is sufficient for you." (And God knows all the reasons why, because he's God).

And so it's not always Jesus' will to heal, but it is ALWAYS his will that we ask him to!

Because it is our testimony, that we believe in resurrection power. (And if the tomb is empty, our hope tank ought to be full).

(And by the way, the healing power of Jesus goes beyond just physical healing.

People that were filled with impure spirits received healing – there's all kind of healing that we need:

Some of you need healing in your body

Some of you need healing – IN YOUR SPIRIT – because there's something broken inside.

I read recently about a preacher who was preaching a revival out West who was asked by a lady to come pray for her husband who had cancer and anoint him with oil --and he did pray, believing he would be healed.

Then, a few weeks later, he got a call from the man's wife.

She said, "I hope you remember me. You prayed for my husband. He had cancer."

He said I immediately thought, "*HAD?*" So it's happened - his cancer is gone." There was a pause.

"No, you don't understand" she said. "He *had* cancer, but a few days ago, he died." "Obviously," he said, "I felt horrible."

Sensing what he felt, she said, "Oh, but don't feel bad.

Because the day you came to pray with him, he was filled with anger. He knew he was going to die in a short period of time, and he hated God—at 58 years old. He wanted to see his children and grandchildren grow up. He was angry that this all-powerful God did not take away his sickness and heal him."

"He would lie in bed and curse God," she said. "And the more his anger grew towards God the more miserable he was to everybody around him. It was an awful thing to be in his presence."

"But," she added, "The day you prayed for him, I noticed when you left a peace and joy come over him I had never before seen, and the last few days have been the best days of our lives."

"We've sang together. We've laughed. We've read Scripture and we've prayed. These have been wonderful days, and I just called to thank you for praying for his *healing*."

He was rather puzzled, but then she said something incredibly profound he said he would never forget.

She said, "He wasn't *cured*, but he was *healed*."

There are some people – so troubled in their souls – and they just need a touch from the Lord.

Some of you need healing in your marriage – you have let status quo have too much power.

Some of you need healing in that area of life where you feel in bondage and out of control.)

You see, all these areas of brokenness occur because sin is in the world, but here's what you need to understand – because of the resurrection of Jesus, we DON'T LIVE IN THE JURISDICTION of the power of sin anymore. (And so Paul could say in Romans, "When we died with Christ, we were set free from the power of sin.")

Now – I'm not a professional counselor, I don't have a professional degree, but I do a lot of counseling. And I do a lot of teaching – and lots of people are facing multiple issues.

Every week, I face someone who believes their struggle is hopeless. (For some of us, our problems are like a knotted-up ball of twine – and we have no idea where to begin untangling it).

But here is what I've learned - Jesus can REVEAL it, and HE can UNRAVEL it. And the more you fill Jesus with your heart, the more things he begins to untangle by his remarkable resurrection power and set free.

So my question is – do you believe in the resurrection? Do you believe in his miraculous power?

Do you think it really happened? Do you think a dead man actually walked out of a tomb and is still alive today? If you say yes, then you MUST BELIEVE that nothing is hopeless! That anything can change. The status quo doesn't have to have the say.

I believe healings are a preview of coming attractions. I believe they are a foretaste of the day when all brokenness is going to surrender to the power of God.

When everything sad, will become untrue.

We will live in a powerful new reality, and if that is your conviction, then the current powers that be, cannot intimidate you ANY MORE!

Which means that my witness, can be fearless.

Now – we're going to read one of my favorite parts of the Bible which is also one of the funniest parts of the Bible.

Read Verse 17. (Now you may remember that the Sadducees were the smaller of the dominate Jewish ruling parties – they only believed in the first 5 books of the bible, they were rich, they had POWER, and they had no use for the supernatural. They did not believe in angels, they did not believe that resurrection was coming).

Now – let's keep reading (and don't tell me that God doesn't have a sense of humor)

Verse 18 – 20

Now - how awesome is it, that God used the angel they did not BELIEVE IN to get them out of the jail they wanted them to STAY IN.

God could have used an earthquake; God could have used anything he wanted.

But he sent an ANGEL. And how awkward was it the next morning – everyone comes in for court, they say go get the prisoners – and there are these guards standing at strict attention in front of a cell that nobody's in. And they have to come back and tell the Sanhedrin, "Well umm, they're gone!"

"Did you open the door?" No.

What happened? I don't know.

Do you get the point? Their unbelief is not due to a lack of evidence!

The empty tomb of Jesus, the healings on the street, prisoners that just disappear from a jail – people don't refuse Christ because there's not evidence to believe in, they refuse Christ because they don't want to give up their self-power.

They want to keep their control.

But you see – God's angel power can trump their arrest power.

And I do believe God sends angels – and I believe (side point) – when we get to glory, we’re going to be stunned how much angelic intervention there was in our lives that we didn’t know about.

The enemy wants to kill and destroy, and you have no idea what God has prevented in your life by angels that you couldn’t see.

ANGELS ARE VERY CLOSE AND NEAR TO US. We may not see them with the eye (though some have), but we see them by faith.

(love this story in Genesis 28– it records how Jacob, on that miserable night he fled from his brother Esau into the wilderness (scared and all alone), laid his weary head on a rock to sleep, and the bible tells us:

He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it (Genesis 28:12).

In a flash, Jacob saw what had been around him the whole time – angelic movement from the spiritual to the physical realm. (Angels were all around him that lonely night).

And

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it . . . How awesome is this place!”

The Bible tells us that angels do a number of things. Here’s a few:

Angels rejoice when a soul is saved (Luke 15:10).

They serve believers (Hebrews 1:14).

They guard and protect humans (Psalm 91:11-12).

They carry believers away to heaven (Luke 16:22).

They open prison doors and bring deliverance (Acts 5:19; 12:6-11)

They communicate God’s will (Acts 8:26).

“The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them” (Ps. 34:7).

Listen – we know that the enemy wants to kill and destroy. BUT - you have no idea what God has prevented in your life by angels you couldn’t see.

Notice next - When God opens door, it’s not just to let people out, it is to get his Word out.

So the angel says – verse 20

In other words, “Go and do some more of what got you in jail in the first place.”

And so, verse 25 – 26

And that’s important. The disciples are practicing the non-violent teachings of Jesus. This is a moment when all they had to do was say and word and the people would have rioted. But they didn’t.

And it’s always been a temptation for Christians to say, “We are going to fight the powers that be with the power of the world.”

But that’s never been Jesus’ way.

Jesus told the disciples, “They will arrest you, throw you in court, in jail . . . but keep preaching.”

And so the disciples thought, “Well, Jesus wanted us to preach on the streets, now we’re getting arrested, so now we’re gonna preach in court. Let’s go back to court.” And they go back to court.

And what do the officials say?

Verse 27-28 (with emphasis)

Now – I totally understand our walk must match our talk. I totally understand that if we live like jerks, no one’s gonna accept the Gospel. But listen – let’s get rid of this notion that we can just be nice people and do nice things and people are going to come to Christ.

Christian faith survives because of verbal testimony.

They didn’t arrest the disciples for feeding the poor. They did not arrest the disciples for healing the sick, they arrested the disciples for talking Jesus!

And it will always be the strategy of the powers that be, to shut down talk about Jesus.

And so Peter and the disciples look up at the court and say, “Hey, we heard you yesterday. **We know what you want – BUT (verse 29) we must obey God rather than human beings.**

So let me ask you, “Who’s in charge here?”

Well - the people on the court have the **power**, but they have no **influence**. They have no leverage.

Because the disciples passion for proclaiming Christ has exceeded their passion for protecting themselves, no matter what it cost them.

We live in strange times. Our great grandparents would never have imagined when it would be legal to take the life of an unborn child.

The powers that be say that’s legal, but that doesn’t make it right.

They wouldn’t have imagined a day when we would package filth, and call it entertainment.

And the powers that be say that’s okay.

There are scores of people who want to change the definition of marriage that has been central and consistent in every single culture – a man and a woman

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy

³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.

That’s God’s plan. It goes back to the very beginning of time when Adam and Eve were created male and female.

And so people in power say, “We want to change that definition and it will be legal.” But that doesn’t make it right.

And the church must decide which court we answer to the most?

(So please hear me - this is not a call to be unkind, unloving, to use worldly power to fight worldly power).

But - the day might come when more Christians are gonna go to jail.

When what we teach from God's Word might be called illegal by the powers that be. And we're going to have to decide what is our first commitment!

Jesus said

"They will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name (Luke 21:12-13).

He never promised we would live without struggle, but he promised he would redeem the struggles. And resurrection power means my suffering is not meaningless.

I want you to look at verse 33-35

The text says the leaders were "furious," and if not for the diplomatic intervention of one man – Gamaliel – they would probably have carried out their will.

The Bible says he was "respected by everyone" – and he says, "Hey, maybe murder is not the best choice here. Let's calm down and be peaceful about this."

36-39

He says, "Hey, we've had cults come and go in the past – Theudas, Judas. If they are manmade, they will fall apart."

So what we learn from this man (who's not even a follower of Jesus) is that we as Christians, in the midst of turbulent times, should be calm, sober-minded, level-headed and clear. (I love how he diffused the situation by 1. Stating the facts, and 2. By slowing things down).

And it shows you that in the midst of trials, God will sometimes bring you help from another source you never expected.

Verse 40a

Flogged – that's simple word but it's not a simple thing. They frayed a rope, and tied to the frayed ends pieces of bone and rock and glass tied to the straps of leather, and ripped their backs open.

40b

And this is a critical moment in history, because the church has never faced physical violence before.

So what's the response gonna be?

Verse 41-42

Somehow they knew their suffering was not meaningless.

When Paul turned his life to the Lord, he was told "how much he must suffer" for the name of Jesus.

And I think one of the things we forget to communicate to people is just how much suffering is a part of the Christian experience. (It's not easy street, folks. There is suffering, you'll be made fun of, you'll have to take the high road and nobody will know why you did it, you'll have to have the

courage to go against the pressure, you'll do what is best for the whole instead of what is best for you – all those things involve suffering.

We follow a man that chose a cross – but resurrection power allows us to choose that path with joy!

And so Thursday, I have the opportunity to take 30 of our high school students to the capitol. And one of our visits was to the Tennessee Museum. And I walked through with our students – their eyes were big – just so much history to take in.

And one of the stops focused on great examples of men and women from Tennessee who were people of courage, who were committed to high values. And these two were side by side:

Selena Holman

When Silena Moore Holman was just a young girl in Tennessee, the Civil War took her father's life.

Suddenly her family was poor, and at only fourteen years old she became a schoolteacher to help feed her younger siblings.

Years later, as a wife and mother of eight, she saw what alcohol was doing to families in her community—homes broken, children hungry, mothers crying. And something in her heart refused to stay silent.

As time progressed, she became a powerful advocate for women's rights – better education for woman and a woman's right to vote.

She wrote many articles and letters to the religious journal **Gospel Advocate**. In these writings she argued that **women should be allowed to teach and speak about the Bible**, challenging the common belief that women must always sit silent in church.

So she began writing, speaking, and fighting for change—not because it was easy, but because she loved people.

And when she died, **more than two thousand people** came to her funeral in 1915. Why?

Because one woman cared enough about hurting families and women who were disregarded to let God use her voice.

And then, next to Selina Holman was the picture of Sam Davis (whose statute also stands on the Capitol lawn).

Samuel Davis is called the “Boy Hero of the Confederacy.”

During the American Civil War, a young Confederate courier named Sam Davis was riding through Tennessee carrying important military papers. He was only twenty-one years old, trusted to deliver information between Confederate leaders.

In Middle Tennessee, Union soldiers captured him and searched his coat. Inside they found the secret documents. They accused him of being a spy.

The officers told him something simple: *“Tell us who gave you these papers, and we'll spare your life.”*

Think about that moment. A young man with his whole life ahead of him. One name could save him.

But Sam Davis refused. He would not betray the man who trusted him.

On November 27, 1863, he was executed. Before his death he said, **“If I had a thousand lives to live, I would give them all rather than betray a friend or my country.”**

And in the moments before his hanging, he looked the Union officer in the eye and said, **“I did my duty, not you do yours.”**

Those were his last words!

And ever since, people have remembered him for one thing— the loyalty of a friend.

As we bring the lesson to an end, I just want to say a couple of things about suffering:

The apostles are healing the sick. People are lining the streets (we saw last week) just let his shadow touch them.

And what happens? They get arrested.

MUSIC

So I don't want you to miss this:

THEY WEREN'T ARRESTED FOR FAILURE.

THEY WERE ARRESTED FOR EFFECTIVENESS.

Sometimes THE PROOF THAT YOU ARE WALKING ON PURPOSE IS NOT APPLAUSE – it's attack!

I love this:

Your SETBACK is not your STOP SIGN.

It's a SETUP for supernatural intervention.

Sometimes that's confusing – because it seems that the more you obey God, the more resistance you feel.

BUT FRICTION IS CONFIRMATION.

If you weren't making an impact, you wouldn't attract attention. (Think about it – you wouldn't put guards around something that isn't powerful, right?)

Resurrection means a story always ends in victory!

So is there a part of your life where the powers that be are trying to take over? Well – the risen Christ can overpower anything!!!

Addiction – a dull marriage – infidelity – depression – greed – sin!

The risen Christ can overpower anything!

Your prison may be physical.

IT may be emotional.

It may be financial. It may be relational.

But no system can imprison what God has ordained!

You don't have to accept a lousy end to your story!

I'm telling you today – the TOMB is empty!