

## Acts 29

### Part 2 - The Holy Spirit Still Makes Us Brave

By Pastor Gary Buck

Summarize Acts 29, Lester's Pentecost message the week before.

The Setting and Timing:

I love how we see the perfect timing of God throughout the scriptures. Jesus himself came at the "fullness" of time.

Most Christian historians say that the church in Jerusalem was at least 10,000 people, and Jerusalem only held about 40,000 at that time.

Why were all these Jews from all over the Roman Empire in Jerusalem? The Feast of Weeks; one of the three feasts in Leviticus that they were to attend in person. There were tents scattered all over the countryside, probably around 200,000 people there.

How did the church in Rome start? Most likely someone from Rome was there at Pentecost and heard the message.

**Kenneth Scott Latorette, history Prof at Yale, said this:**

**"Never in so short a time has any other religious faith—or for that matter any other set of ideas, religious, political or economic—ever achieved so commanding a position in such an important culture without the aid of physical force, or social or cultural prestige."**

In other words, Christianity should NOT have spread.

Islam was spread through force and conquest, especially in its early years.

Not only did Christianity not have support to help it spread, there was also great persecution set against them.

To be a Christian in the early church could cost you everything.

Only the Holy Spirit could make a following of a carpenter's son grow.

Only the Holy Spirit can make us spiritually brave.

**The same God that stood behind the gospel in the early church still stands behind you today!**

Turn to Acts 5

Summary of Acts 5- The apostles have only recently been filled with the HS. They were healing people and performing miracles. (People even wanting to walk in Peter's shadow to be healed). They were preaching in the temple area, but the high priest and Sadducees took the apostles prisoner. Then an angel freed them and told them to go BACK to the temple and preach.

The high priest and Sanhedrin had assembled for a trial and sent for the apostles to be brought before them, but then heard the apostles weren't in prison, rather they were BACK at the temple preaching. So they arrest the apostles again and bring them before them.

**Acts 5:29-33** Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings! The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.

**1) The Holy Spirit replaces our fear of the world with God’s love for the lost.**

The Jewish government, in a sense, commanded the apostles to be silent.

Our government (as of now) cannot command us to be silent about Christ, but we can still fear the world and rejection. Media has told us to be silent. But we must obey God rather than man.

***The Holy Spirit reprioritizes the value of our lives vs the value of the unsaved soul.***

The apostles were brave because God’s spirit had impressed on them the value of the human soul.

O Holy Night- When He appeared and the soul felt its worth

Desmond Doss (Picture)- During WWII he was a pacifist combat medic. His faith kept him from firing a weapon. During the battle of Okinawa, he rescued the lives of approximately 75 men on what was called Hacksaw Ridge.

After he had saved all these men, he himself was greatly wounded. Soldiers found him and put him on a litter, but as they were carrying him off the battlefield he saw a more critically wounded soldier. He crawled off the litter and told the medics to help the other man instead. While he was waiting his arm was shattered. He wrapped his arm in a rifle and crawled 300 yards to the medic station.

Desmond Doss, a follower of Christ, knew the value of the human soul. And so he was willing to sacrifice his own safety for others.

***“Through his outstanding bravery and unflinching determination in the face of desperately dangerous conditions Private First Class Doss saved the lives of many soldiers. His name became a symbol throughout the 77th Infantry Division for outstanding gallantry far above and beyond the call of duty.” Harry Truman***

Are we going “far and beyond the call of duty?”

Moving on....A Pharisee named Gamaliel stood up in front of the assembly and basically said that many people have come before who had followers, but after they died, their followers dissipated.

So he said,

**Acts 5:38-42**

<sup>38</sup> Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. <sup>39</sup> But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves *fighting against God.*”

<sup>40</sup> His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

<sup>41</sup> The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for **the Name**. <sup>42</sup> Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

Imagine the scene. The apostles leaving the Sanhedrin basically high-fiving. Their backs are probably bloody, maybe they have a few loose teeth...it what world does this make sense?

What's the difference between the disciples of the Gospels and the apostles in Acts? The Holy Spirit has made them brave!

What does it mean that they rejoiced because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for "the Name."

"Onoma" in Greek means "name, character, reputation" all in one.

In Jewish culture, the Name was the essence of the person and they're inseparable. And Jesus' name (Yishua) means salvation. It HAD to mean "God is salvation."

Christians- Do we get what it really means to be called a Christian, that the NAME of Christ is the banner over us? We're ambassadors of THE NAME.

So the apostles continue to preach the name of Jesus, but then something happens that actually makes them pause, stop and recalibrate.

## 2) The Holy Spirit empowers us to face injustice head-on

Injustice offends the Holy Spirit. And so our hearts should be offended.

**Acts 6:1-4** In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

Who are the Hellenistic Jews? They were Jews who had abandoned their native language and had adopted the Greek culture and were spread throughout the Roman empire. The Hebraic Jews, who still lived in Israel, were prejudice against them. The apostle Paul was a Hellenistic Jew.

So what is the problem here? Widows were being overlooked at some sort of food bank. But notice the text says THEIR widows were being overlooked, indicating that the Hebraic Jews were feeding their widows but NOT the Hellenistic Jewish widows.

<sup>2</sup> So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. <sup>3</sup> Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them <sup>4</sup> and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

They apostles aren't saying here that taking care of the widows is beneath them. How do we know? They basically say here, "We can't keep preaching if we know that those who are needy aren't being taken care of." Injustice is so offensive to God because he knows it will **distract from the message of the gospel.**

So they selected a man named Stephen, ***full of the Holy Spirit***, as well as a number of other men with Greek names, and laid hands on them and commissioned them....

**Acts 6:7** *So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.*

Permit me a rabbit trail here, but I believe it is important for we as the church to say something about current events.

When we see things happening like the white supremacist gathering in Charlottesville Virginia, where these neo-Nazis are speaking hate against those of other races, and often in the name of Christianity, it distracts from the truth of the gospel.

It is time for the church to rise up against racial and ethnic prejudice. It is a disease on society, and the more we stay silent and don't stand up against what those are saying, "In the name of the church." The more people will be turned off from the church. We're all getting lumped together.

We see in the book of Revelation that people from every tribe and tongue will be there. Racial diversity will be present in heaven. And there is divine beauty in our diversity.

When the church ignores injustice the we become repulsive to the world.

Jesus said the two greatest commandments were to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself.

The Roman Emperor Julian, who persecuted Christians, said reluctantly, "the godless Galileans feed our poor in addition to their own."

It takes bravery to stand up against injustice.

Your love for justice, taking care of those in need- will speak the gospel profoundly to the world around us.

### **3) When we are full of the Holy Spirit our perspective shifts from the risk to our reward.**

**Acts 6:8-10** <sup>8</sup> Now Stephen, a man full of God's **grace** and **power**, performed great wonders and signs among the people. <sup>9</sup> Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. <sup>10</sup> *But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.*

The religious leaders are seeing both the grace and power of God, working through Stephen. But they rose up in opposition but they couldn't overcome Stephen's wisdom because it came from the Spirit!

So they start making up lies about Stephen, saying he blasphemed Moses and God. So then in Chapter 7 they confront Stephen and ask him if the charges are true or not. Then Stephen gives the longest sermon recorded in Acts. He recounts the story of Abram through Joseph, Moses and the Red Sea, David and Solomon. And he kept telling them how the Israelites kept refusing to obey over and over, even once they had the law.

### Acts 7:51-53

<sup>51</sup> “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! <sup>52</sup> Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— <sup>53</sup> you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”

He’s basically telling them two things:

- 1) They’ve always resisted the Holy Spirit and His prophets.
- 2) They can’t even obey the law that they so cherish

Most of the Sadducees did not really even believe in the supernatural, including angels- He’s saying they aren’t taking the Torah seriously.

They saw the parting of the Red Sea, the plagues, and their response? Worship a golden calf.

Now things are getting real. Stephen knew how to push their buttons.

**Acts 7:54-58** <sup>54</sup> When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. <sup>55</sup> But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. <sup>56</sup> “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man *standing* at the right hand of God.”

<sup>57</sup> At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, <sup>58</sup> dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Why were they so enraged? At first, they were just mad because he was telling them everything that they did wrong. I’m sure that’s not the first time. But here he says, “I see the glory of God.”

The only one allowed to stand in the glorious presence of God was the high priest. And that was once a year. But even he didn’t SEE God. Stephen has basically said, “My position is higher than yours.”

So rather than receive the Godly correction, they decided to just kill him.

How did Stephen remain strong and bold?

## PERSPECTIVE

Stephen found great strength to speak boldly because he was filled with the Holy Spirit and his perspective switched from the threat of death to Jesus, his eternal reward.

Ladder analogy

I believe that God wants to change our perspective this morning, so that we're so full of the Holy Spirit all we SEE is Jesus in everything.

Aruba- When you're seasick, you keep your eye on the horizon. It doesn't change. It's when your perspective is fixed that you're filled with peace.

Also, it is interesting to note that Jesus was standing at the right hand of the Father. Everywhere else in scripture when we see him at the Father's right hand he is sitting.

### Acts 7:59-60

<sup>59</sup> While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." <sup>60</sup> Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

He echoes the words of Jesus on the cross before he died.

Did Stephen LOSE when he died? To live is Christ but to die is gain.

Martyrs can get a bum rap, because people often think of the suicide bombers. **An Islamic martyr causes the death of others to assure themselves of salvation. Christians are willing to be a martyr because they are sure of their salvation through the death of Christ.**

Then we get a preview of what is to come. Saul, who would become the greatest evangelist ever, was there.

**Acts 8:1,3** And Saul approved of their killing him.

On that day, a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. <sup>3</sup> ...Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

## INVITATION:

God loves to use ordinary people. But when you have the HS, you are no longer ordinary.

### John 14:12 (NLT)

<sup>12</sup> "I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father.

In what area are you afraid to be a Christian and let your light shine?

Remember, the same God that stood behind the gospel in the early church still stands behind you today!

**Acts 8:14-17** <sup>14</sup> When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. <sup>15</sup> When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, <sup>16</sup> because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>17</sup> Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Ministry- Those who want MORE of the HS, freedom from fear