

Unstoppable Kingdom

Locally: Tale of Two Kingdoms

Acts 5:17-42

Charles Dickens famously wrote, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times” as the opening to one of the most powerful pieces in English Literature, *A Tale of Two Cities*. If you have not yet read the book, it’s historical fiction which depicts life for the commoners and aristocracy in the years leading up to the French Revolution. Dickens masterfully paints a picture of the two very different realities being experienced in the same place.

Tale of Two Kingdoms: Over 1,700 years prior to the French Revolution, in the Bible, we have a Tale of Two Kingdoms described in the book of Acts.

“God’s active and sovereign reign throughout history bringing about His purposes in the world through Christ Jesus. In the simplest of terms, the Kingdom of God is what the world looks like when King Jesus gets His way.”

Jeff Christopherson

Primary Text: *“But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him, (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ‘Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.’ And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, ‘We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.’ Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. And someone came and told them, ‘Look! The men whom you put into prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.’ Then the captain with the officers went and brought them in, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, ‘We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.’ But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.’ When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. And he said to them, ‘Men of Israel, take care of what you are about to do with these men. For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if*

this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!’ So they took his advice, and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.” **Acts 5:17-42**

Main Idea: The Unstoppable Kingdom is Most Clearly Seen in Contrast to Temporary Kingdoms

I. **Temporary Kingdoms of this World**

The Sanhedrin Displays Three Temporary Kingdoms of this World.

- **Religious Kingdoms – Acts 5:17-18, 21b-26**

Their view of the Law and rule of the Temple demanded that they stop this movement led by the apostles. A religious kingdom kept them from God’s Unstoppable Kingdom!

Don’t give your life to a temporary religious kingdom!

- **Personal Kingdoms – Acts 5:27-28**

“... you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” **Acts 5:28b**

The Jewish leadership had two primary interconnected focuses. It was to keep the peace and keep the power. If there was an uprising, Rome would come to crush it and anoint other local leaders who could keep the peace.

“We shouldn’t be surprised, granted what happened so far, that the high priest and his aristocratic family and colleagues would regard the movement as a direct threat to their status, power and importance.” **N.T. Wright**

We all have personal kingdoms to manage. Families, budgets, relationships, etc. which is appropriate, but these lesser personal kingdoms must never rule our hearts above the Unstoppable Kingdom of God. Those lesser kingdoms must be oriented around God’s Unstoppable Kingdom.

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” **Matthew 6:33**

- **Counterfeit Kingdoms – Acts 5:33-37**

Gamaliel referenced two false messiah’s that had risen in Israel in the previous years. These counterfeit Christs led people astray with various promises that they had no possibility of delivering.

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits...” **Matt 7:15-16a**

Counterfeit Kingdoms abound in our day. Watch your associations (politics, affinity, identifiers, etc.) because they can lead you astray!

II. Eternal Kingdom of Almighty God

• Kingdom Power – Acts 5:19, 38-40

“But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors & brought them out...(Gamaliel said) You might even be found opposing God!” Acts 5:19, 39b

We don't suffer as they did. But we have the same mandate of those apostles to surrender ourselves to the will of our King and Kingdom. If we do that, then we are assured that God is for us and that God's power is with us!

• Kingdom Preaching – Acts 5:20-21a

“...speak to the people all the words of this Life...” Acts 5:20b

Preaching is not only the death and resurrection of Jesus, it's the way that belief in that message re-orientes our lives around an Unstoppable Kingdom.

• Kingdom Perspective – Acts 5:29-32, 41-42

“...we must obey God rather than men...the God of our Fathers raised Jesus...we are witnesses...then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer...they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ was Jesus.” Acts 5

What matters most to citizens of the eternal kingdom? Not safety, comfort, health, wealth, power, or any other temporary thing. What matters to citizens of God's Unstoppable Kingdom is advancing that kingdom with courage, joy, faithfulness, endurance, fervor and passion.

Beating: Don't think of a switch or paddle, they suffered a flogging referenced in Deuteronomy 25 (40 minus 1). It was the same beating that Christ suffered before he was made to carry the cross to Golgotha. Don't mistake their rejoicing as an indication that the pain was light...

“But even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled.” 1 Peter 3:14

To which kingdom will you swear allegiance? It depends on which you feel is more valuable, precious, and true.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” Matthew 13:44-46

When we see the true value and beauty of the Unstoppable Kingdom of God, surrendering our temporary kingdoms of this world is the only logical thing to do.

Become a citizen of God's Kingdom in repentance & faith. Relegate every other king and kingdom to second place behind God's Unstoppable Kingdom!

Sources and Further Reading Opportunities:

- *CSB Study Bible* – Trevin Wax, General Editor (2021)
- *The Bible Exposition Commentary* – Warren Wiersbe (1996)
- *Word Pictures in the New Testament* – A.T. Robertson (1933)
- *The New American Commentary: Acts* – John B. Polhill (1992)
- *Acts: Bible Study Commentary* – F.F. Bruce (2017)
- *Acts for Everyone* – N.T. Wright (2008)
- *Acts: The Church Afire* – Kent Hughes (1996)
- *Acts* – K.O. Gangle (1998)
- *The Kingdom of God* – Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1992)
- *Kingdom First* – Jeff Christopherson (2015)
- *The Kingdom Agenda* – Tony Evans (1999)
- *A Tale of Two Cities* – Charles Dickens (1859)