

- Morning everyone, as Pastor Kyle said I'm Drake Rider, a Pastoral Resident here at Union church. It's my privilege to get the chance to open God's word with you this morning. We've been going through the book of Acts as a church this summer, and we're just going to pick up where we left off last week.
- But before getting into acts, I want to warn you that there are two gospels you'll hear today. Here at Union church we share good news about Jesus every week, but at some point this afternoon you will walk out those doors, or even within these doors encounter another, American gospel. You will hear the good news that you can pursue anything you want in life. That you can be whoever you want to be. And that no one can tell you otherwise.
  - We live in the age of individualism, where the pursuit of self is the highest good. **We tend to celebrate those who take their own unique path in life and find success doing so.**
    - Success in the eyes of the world is defined quite simply. We are quick to celebrate the accomplishments of the powerful & wealthy.
  - In the book *Garden City*, author John Mark Comer gives a few surprising statistics: "Since 1950, the per capita income of Americans has tripled. The average size of an American home has gone up by almost a thousand square feet, from about 1,300 to 2,300. But the average size of the family has been cut in half - from 4 to 2 children"
    - So let me state this trend another way: in America our income is greater than ever, houses are bigger than ever, but it's not because the needs of the family has grown, as the number of mouths to feed is fewer than it's been.
  - Where's all this money going? I think we can naturally assume that the standard of living is sky high compared to the past.
    - **Because of this ever growing expectation to increase our standard of living, we naturally pursue the American dream.** Let me give a few examples of how this plays into our daily mindset that we might not even realize:
      - No one has to convince us that a three day work week is more envious than a six day work week. It's not much of a debate that a vacation is more satisfying than a week of physical work in your particular trade. But why? **The craving for leisure is in the air we breathe.**
      - Think about how we celebrate the big promotion & the pay raise, but forget to appreciate years of faithful service that go unrecognized. The financial rewards call for recognition in a way that day in and day out hard work does not. **It's only natural that we love money.**

- Or consider your own heart posture: the more power we have at work, the more confidence we feel walking into the school or hospital you work in. We long for the day that the authority of our voice is heard, the day others bend to our needs, the day we finally earn the respect of our others. **In working class America, we are wired to crave influence.**
    - But in our culture something isn't working. For some reason we find ourselves living in the most depressed and anxious generation in history.
    - The pursuit of comfort, money and power has not satisfied. **Our soul longs for a satisfaction that's meant to be found outside of ourselves, not within. Maybe it's time we see the culture's lies for what they really are, maybe it's time we find a new way of life.**
      - We're going to look at an example of how the early Christ followers were required to turn against these lies. If you can believe it, our brothers & sisters 2000 years ago struggled with some of the same sins that we fall into today.
- This story is from the book of Acts, a historical account of how the church got started. In chapter 8 we find out that the first church plant was involuntary and unplanned.
  - It all began with persecution. We'll see that as believers are running from the religious leaders to a new city, they bring the news of Jesus' resurrection with them. This leads to new conversions, baptisms, the indwelling of the holy spirit, and also a call for repentance.
    - There's quite a bit in this chapter, but I have three implications from the text that I want to focus on.
  - Today's scripture teaches us: **Repentance demands we give up control of comfort, money, and power in order to FOLLOW Jesus.**
    - I'll repeat that . . . the main point that I want to draw from our passage today is: **Repentance demands we GIVE UP CONTROL of comfort, money, and power in order to FOLLOW Jesus.**
- FIRST: Jesus followers are called to give up the control of COMFORT.
  - In the story, Stephen has just been stoned to death for his faith.
  - We pick up this story in verse 1 of chapter 8, as we read that *[READ VERSE 1 And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.]*
    - Do these places sound familiar? It's a direct callback to the last words Jesus said to his disciples before his ascension.
    - This is from Acts chapter 1 as Jesus declares "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth"
      - The disciples would remember this line well, but I'm willing to bet they did not expect it to happen this way.

- Imagine you've just seen your mentor of three years shamefully murdered, he miraculously re-appears to teach you about the kingdom of God for over a month, then he floats up to heaven declaring you will tell about him in every region of the globe.
  - You might expect something dramatic was about to happen next. Maybe a culture shift brewing, or there would be an overthrow of the Roman government.
    - Even on Jesus' LAST DAY they're expecting domination and establishment of a new government asking, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"
    - Can you hear the desperation in their voice for a BIG change?
- Instead of a government takeover, their friend Stephen is killed.
  - You see, church, **sometimes the Lord's plan makes it feel like life isn't going according to plan.** It sometimes takes death and hardship to achieve God's ultimate purpose.
    - It's like a piece of coal that once under strain and pressure, only then does that clump of coal become a beautiful diamond.
  - God ordains the ends AND the means of His plans. He's in control of not only the results, but how it comes to be.
    - If it wasn't for the death of Stephen, the church would not have reached the ends of the earth.
- We read [*READ VERSE 2-3 Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison*]
- The same God that declared his disciples would represent him in Samaria, this God is now causing his followers to RUN there as they flee for their lives.
  - Now if you're familiar with the Bible, you might know that the Jews and Samaritans despised each other. The Jews even prayed that God would not hear the prayers of the Samaritans! There was ethnic prejudice between these two groups. It's safe to assume that the Jewish Christians would have been resistant to being missionaries in Samaria. So God sent them there running for their lives.
- Now put yourself in their shoes: what would you do if you narrowly escaped imprisonment for your faith?

- Let's see what first believers did: *[READ VERSE 4-8 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philp, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city]*
    - This makes no sense. After running from their oppressor, these Christ followers can't help but speak of Jesus. It's almost as if they have a new kind of power . . .
    - In the past when crowds who followed Jesus saw him arrested and dragged to trial, they scattered and went into hiding.
      - Now empowered with the Holy Spirit, Jesus followers when persecuted are preaching!
        - RC Sproul points out in this passage: "the early church spread the faith not through professional clergy but through the laity. All the people took the gospel to the outer regions of the empire."
      - That's people like us, not Pastor Ethan, not Pastor Kyle, but people like you and me when attacked, choosing to keep speaking of the risen Jesus.
        - **Oh that Union church would experience a small taste of the boldness these disciples had!**
  - To follow Jesus is to give up some of your COMFORT in order to witness to the lost.
    - True disciples of Jesus can't help but speak of the gospel, the Holy Spirit inside compels them to.
- Remember I want to focus in on Comfort, Money & Power.
  - My SECOND point I want to pull out of the text is: Jesus followers are called to give up the control of MONEY.
    - We see a few key characters in verses 9 through 24.
      - It starts with an entertainer who has captivated the locals with some sort of magic named Simon.
      - There's a believer, Philip, who's working miracles, preaching, & baptizing the magician Simon and others in the city.
      - And finally along comes the great apostles Peter and John who are sent in like the navy seal team 6 to finish the job and bring the Holy Spirit.
        - Through these characters, we see how God's church was forming in profound but also messy ways.

- Here we see the story of a man who claimed to believe, and suddenly got called out for being wicked. Stories like this are refreshing, isn't the Bible such an honest book? There's no cover up here - the early church was far from perfect.
  - We see cracks in the institution that we continue to see today in the 21st century. **Isn't it reassuring to know we're not alone when it comes to ministry being messy?**
- Okay, now let's focus in on Simon.
  - He's a man who seemed to have a miraculous testimony. He's the kind of guy you'd ask to speak at the local retreat or summer camp to share how Jesus can change even the most far gone sinner.
    - He started out GAINING followers using trickery and sorcery, then flipped to BECOMING a follower. The passage tells that Simon believed and was baptized.
  - But then we discover that part of Simon's motives were deeply mistaken.
    - You see, money is NOT the currency of the kingdom.
    - I'll say that again: Money is NOT the currency of the kingdom.
      - Let's read verse 18: *[READ VERSE 18-19 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit"]*
      - Here we see someone whose heart is still stuck on using money for selfish gain. Don't we too at times place our faith in money as the means to achieve what we long for?
        - I for one, know that I believe the lie that if I could just accrue enough money for a house downpayment, then I could trade it for the SECURITY & STABILITY that a house represents.
        - See my exchange isn't much different than Simon's. I tell God that I want stability, and instead of trusting Him, I lack contentment & long for the ability to exchange currency for a sense of peace only the Lord can provide.
    - Jesus followers are called to trust God for the gifts He has given each individual uniquely. We are not called to buy gifts of the spirit, but trust in faith that God will give his gifts and his power in His timing.
      - Church, let us give up the control of MONEY, and place our faith in the giver of every good gift.

- The THIRD observation I want to share with you from our text today is: Jesus followers are called to give up the control of POWER.
  - Do you see how money is intertwined with power? Simon was used to being known as a powerful man.
    - Elsewhere, the Bible tells us “from the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks” and here we see a man who reveals his true colors, spilling out that he will pay a high price to once again be known as someone great.
  - In response, Peter gives one of the harshest rebukes possible. Did you catch it?
    - “May your silver **PERISH WITH YOU**, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money”
      - This is in line with eternal curses we see throughout the Bible. To perish is the eternal death of the soul.
      - Sproul points out that “We find here a biblical euphemism. What Peter said was this: ‘You and your money go to hell.’ He pronounced the worst judgment upon this sorcerer and [declared] him & his request to the deepest regions of hell itself.”
  - The problem was that Simon saw a miraculous act of Peter/John, and struggled to let God ALONE get the glory.
    - Now you have to remember, the book of Acts is a story, meaning when we read this - this is NOT an instruction or command to mimic the apostles' unique God given power.
      - The apostles' power seen in this time had a specific purpose.
      - Peter and John had the gift of giving the Spirit through laying on of hands SO THAT their eye witness testimony of seeing the risen Jesus with their own two eyes would be validated.
        - The power's purpose was God's glory, and his glory alone.
        - Church, let's not make the mistake of seeing powerful works of God and try to steal some of the glory for ourselves.
  - That's what repentance demands. Repentance demands that Jesus followers give up the control of POWER.
- So enough about Simon, what about you: Is your heart right before God? Simon's wasn't, what about you?
  - Because that's what it means to follow Jesus - it's to have a heart in right standing before God.
  - You see, Jesus told a story to his disciples about the possibilities of what happens when someone hears the word of God
    - Jesus told a parable of a sower planting seeds. He explained that as the gardener scattered seeds, some were **eaten by birds**, some didn't have enough soil and were **scorched by the sun**, other seeds were **choked out by thorns**, and only a few landed in **good soil which produced grain**.

- Later in Matthew 13 when Jesus explains this parable to his disciples, he makes it plain as day, no secrets on its meaning.
  - He said that the seed that fell among the THORNS is “The one who hears the word, but the CARES OF THE WORLD and the DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.”
  - Does this look at all like the magician Simon? It looks a lot like his “cares of the world” (such as power) and “deceitfulness of riches” (his money) that Peter calls out as wicked unfruitful.
- So my question to you is: is your heart right before God?
  - Have the cares of the world and desire of riches choked out the implanted word?
  - Have you obeyed God rightly when it comes to comfort? Money? Power?
    - I hope no one here would claim they have been without sin in these areas. You see, we are sinful, disobedient creatures.
    - And one day, no matter who you are, one day you will stand before a holy and perfect God and give an account of all you’ve done.
      - We sometimes take this lightly, but let’s not take it lightly today.
      - **There must be justice for the wrong done in the world.** When you value comfort, money and power over God himself, **when you worship the creation rather than the Creator, punishment is in order.**
- But, there is good news. There is GOOD news, that “for the joy set before Him, [there is a man that] endured the cross”
  - This man gave up the comforts of heaven to take on flesh. This man didn’t let the cares of the world choke out the word. This man wasn’t deceived by riches and He didn’t prove unfruitful. This man’s name was Jesus and though his whole life he never sinned, he became sin for us.
    - This means he took upon himself every wrong you committed, every time you worshiped the idols of the world.
    - You can call it a substitution: a one for one swap.
      - Your shame, for his glory.
      - Your evil, for the righteousness of God.
- He not only took our sin, but he took the rightful wrath of God as he cried on the cross “my Father, my Father, why have you abandoned me?”
  - Though he brutally died a shameful death, he didn’t stay dead.
  - Though he was buried in Joseph’s tomb, on the third day he came alive again.
    - So now we have a LIVING sacrifice, good for all of eternity.
    - If you’re not a follower of Jesus, this is your next step. And if you are a follower of Jesus, this is your next step:
      - Repent, and surrender the new direction of your life to following the risen Jesus!

- Now with the gospel in mind, how do we know if our heart is right before God? Let's try to set up a framework for how we might answer that question.
    - Cause you might be sitting here wondering: Am I Simon and never realized it? How do I know Jesus' blood covers me? That my faith is genuine? If only there was a way to guarantee our eternal standing . . .
      - Guys THAT'S the holy spirit. It took me a long time to figure this out, please do not miss this!
      - Ephesians 1 tells us "when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, [you were] sealed with the Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it!"
        - Notice that language: SEALED. It's a GUARANTEE.
        - There is no mistaking this: if the Holy Spirit is within you, you are saved.
    - But how do you know if the Holy Spirit is within you?
      - God gave us a list of what the Spirit looks like in a person. You guys ever heard that list from Gal 5? "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control"
        - God gave us these as evidence of the Spirit within you.
          - 1. The fruit of the Spirit has been given so you can testify to your own salvation.
          - 2. The fruit is given so that other believers can testify in an act of encouragement, constantly pointing out the evidence of the Spirit's work in your life.
            - Union church, WE AS A BODY should call out the fruit we see in one another.
      - But if you're hearing me talk about these fruits (of love, joy, peace) and you're hearing "TRY harder!" Let me just correct you.
        - That's not Christianity. It's not about trying harder.
        - The promise of the Holy Spirit is that over time He'll complete the work that he's begun in you.
        - Like a tree that naturally grows fruit from its branches, you will start to see overtime fruit of the spirit naturally flow out of you by God's grace.
      - So friends, we can have CONFIDENCE.
        - Not confidence in ourselves, but confidence in the Spirit of God that dwells in us.
- With this new confidence . . . I want to offer up a few application points, just ideas of how you can take what we've learned and live it out.

- Give up your control of COMFORT.
  - How is the Lord calling you to be uncomfortable for the sake of the gospel?
    - This week, open your home to your neighbors, hear their story, their worldview, ask good questions, and listen before you say anything about yourself.
    - Invite your coworker to lunch, and let the Spirit inside you provide the words to testify how Jesus changed your life.
  
- Give up your control of MONEY.
  - Jesus talked about money more than almost any other topic to BOTH the rich AND the poor.
    - Fight the temptation to make an idol out of money by practicing sacrificial giving. Trust your heavenly Father to provide for every need.
  - What injustices & NEEDS of the world break your heart? Research nonprofits that fight for those causes. Fight injustice with not just your mouth but with your wallet.
  
- Give up your control of POWER.
  - In your job, demonstrate servant leadership like Jesus by not making decisions for your benefit, but make decisions for the benefit of your coworkers, customers, and the world at large.
  - If like Simon, you have worked to gather a following to make yourself great, receive the Spirit's conviction.
    - Know that you are not condemned if you are in Christ Jesus.
    - Confess your sin so that your heart is right before God.
  
- Now, with the power of God in you, the same spirit that was in the temple's holy of holies, the same spirit that filled Jesus, "live by the spirit . . . walk in step with the Spirit!"
  - And as you go, and are scattered from here: Turn from the control of comfort. Turn from the control of money. Turn from the control of power. Repent, be forgiven, and follow the risen Jesus.
  
- Let's bow our heads . . .
  - Father, we have done things offensive against you time and time again. If we're honest, we see the selfishness & wickedness in our own hearts every day.
  - Lord, you are the only good in this world. Jesus have mercy on me, a sinner. Jesus have mercy on Union church, for we are sinners.
  - Thank you for taking the punishment for our sin. Lead us not into the temptations of idolizing comfort, money and power. Holy Spirit would you fill us as we go from here. We love you Lord. Amen.