

GO, STAND, AND TELL THE MESSAGE

Acts 5:17-42

Key Verse: 5:20

“Go, stand in the temple courts,’ he said, ‘and tell the people the full message of this new life.’”

In the last passage we learned that the Christian church is God’s dwelling place. We must come to church to honor God. As we listen to his word, we must honestly confess and repent our sins. Then Jesus gives us grace. Jesus forgives our sins and saves us from death. Jesus gives us a living hope in the kingdom of God. When we know Jesus, we are free to serve God and to love others. We can learn how to give to others. A giving spirit should be ever-growing in the church of Christ. A giving spirit leads to a missionary-sending movement. Shepherd Joseph Horvath once gave his portion of his father’s inheritance to his brother. It was literally like selling a house and giving the money to the poor. This act of giving pleased God. God blessed him spiritually. He grew in a sacrificial spirit. Later, he could take the cross of being a fellowship leader in Chicago UBF. Last Friday, he shared a meaningful report on the work of God in Paraguay. Now he prays to be a permanent missionary somewhere in South America in God’s time. When young Americans receive the grace of Jesus and practice a giving spirit, something great will happen. America can grow into a missionary-sending country all the more. May God help Erin Anderson, Erik Johnson, Adam Kramarczyk and many others to learn the giving spirit of Jesus. May God raise one million missionaries from America in this century.

In today’s passage the apostles are again confronted by persecution from the Jewish religious leaders. God does not tell them to retreat, but to advance by faith and give the full message of new life to perishing people. When they obey, God works with them through his angel and the Holy Spirit to defeat the power of darkness and advance the gospel. This requires the apostles to suffer. But they emerge more joyful and victorious than ever. May God help us to obey God, like them.

First, “Go, stand in the temple courts” (17-21a).

The Holy Spirit was working mightily in the Jerusalem church, especially through Peter. People saw in Peter a true shepherd for God’s flock. They were bringing their sick into the streets and laying them on beds and mats so that Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Those troubled by evil spirits asked Peter’s prayer. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the sick were healed and evil spirits were driven out. There was true joy and God’s power in the Christian fellowship. The work of God was even spreading to the surrounding towns. When the religious leaders saw this, they were not happy. It exposed their sin of selfishness which made their hearts so dry and empty. Like Cain and King Saul before them, instead of repenting, they became jealous of God’s servants and then became enemies of God. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. They thought they could stop the apostles with court action and prison bars.

Look at verse 19. “But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.” God was with the apostles. To God, it was an easy thing to open the prison doors and set his servants free. We don’t know if the angel flexed his spiritual muscle and popped the door open with his might, or whether he used his finesse to pick the lock. In any case, he easily opened the jail door. What a comfort it is to know that angels of the Lord work together with God’s people to accomplish his holy mission.

Look at verse 20. “Go, stand in the temple courts,’ he said, ‘and tell the people the full message of this new life.’” The angel did not say to them, “You are free. Run fast and get away from here.” The angel told them to go and stand in the temple courts and tell the people the full message of new life in Jesus. Here we learn the heart of God. God is willing to sacrifice to proclaim the gospel to sinners. God sent his Son Jesus into a hostile environment as the first missionary. Jesus fulfilled his mission to save men from sin through his death and resurrection. Now, God was sending his apostles back to the temple courts at the risk of their lives. As God required Jesus to sacrifice, God required the apostles to sacrifice. God wants to save perishing souls. God’s servants must know his heart. God’s servants must be willing to sacrifice to preach the message of new life in a perishing world.

We also learn the mission of the Christian church. It is to preach the gospel, regardless of opposition. This time, the angel of the Lord commanded them to preach to the people in the temple courts. The temple was supposed to be God’s house, where people could come to hear his word and pray. But under the control of the high priest it had become a den of robbers. While on earth, Jesus had been very angry at this and cleansed the temple by driving out godless merchants. Jesus used the temple as a place of Bible study. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, the believers, filled with the Holy Spirit, used the temple for Bible study, worship and prayer. However, in many ways, the temple was under the control of the high priest. He had his own well-paid police force. When he became jealous of the apostles, he tried to stop the believers from meeting there. In truth, Satan wanted to cut off the life-giving word of God from his people. The temple was like a spiritual battlefield. The angel of the Lord said to the apostles, “Go, stand in the temple courts....” The apostles did not have any legal or political clout to depend on. But God sent them anyway. God wanted them to go by faith, occupy the temple courts and preach the gospel.

“Go, stand in the temple courts....” What does this mean to us? To some, it may mean to stand in churches across America. God knows we need solid Biblical preaching in our nations’ churches. In addition, it means to stand on the campuses of American universities. Nowadays, there is a general impression that American universities are secular institutions. But in fact, most American universities were established by Christians for the purpose of producing Christian leaders. As we know well, Harvard University was originally a training school for young preachers of the gospel. The University of Chicago, with its gothic architecture, seems to be centuries old. But in fact, it is little more than one hundred years old. Financed by John D. Rockefeller, its first leader was William Rainey Harper. Mr. Harper met Christ personally at a Baptist prayer meeting in 1876. After that, his primary passion in life was to teach the Bible to common people in America. He led an influential national movement called “The Bible Renaissance,” with a goal of placing the Bible at the center of American cultural life. He once said, “My special business in the world is stirring up people on the English Bible. The University of Chicago is entirely a second hand matter.” In terms of theology, Harper tended to be rather liberal. Nevertheless, his goal in founding the University of Chicago was to promote the gospel in America. As we know, Northwestern University was founded by hard-working Methodists. They gave it the key verse of Philippians 4:8. “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

These days, however, there is a definite resistance to the name of Jesus in many of our universities. At one institute in Chicago, a UBF shepherd was persecuted because he said that homosexuality is sin according to the Bible. In another university in Chicago, most of the high level managers in a department that deals directly with students are openly homosexual. God loves them. But they are generally hostile toward the name of Jesus and toward sincere Christians. Not only them, many who are antagonistic

toward the name of Jesus are in positions of leadership in American universities. At the same time, God's heart is broken for students in these universities. God's word says to us today, "Go, stand in the student centers of American universities and tell the people the full message of this new life." God wants to give new life to students in American universities.

Look at verse 20 again. "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life." What is the full message of this new life? It is fully contained in the four gospels. Peter has summarized this message three times thus far in the book of Acts (2:22-39; 3:13-26; 4:8-12). Simply speaking, it is this: Jesus was God in the flesh; Jesus died for our sins; God raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to his own right hand as Lord and Christ; this Risen Christ will come again as King and Judge; at present, the Risen Christ sends the Holy Spirit to those who accept him; this all happened according to the Scriptures; the apostles are witnesses; whoever repents of his sins and believes will receive new life that is eternal, and the kingdom of God as his inheritance. What a wonderful message! This message of new life can save anyone from sin and death. Shepherd Jack Magardician was once a struggling Oakton College student. Because he enjoyed the pleasures of sin, he flunked out of Oakton twice. God had mercy on him and called him to one-to-one Bible study in UBF. The message of new life in Jesus moved his heart and he accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord. His sins of selfishness, laziness, lust, and so on were gradually washed away and he became a new person. He learned how to study hard and could finish a history degree at UIC. He became a responsible husband and father. And now he has become the newest fellowship leader in Chicago UBF with a clear mission to share the message of new life in Jesus with Oakton College students. His new life came through the gospel message. This message is powerful enough to give new life to anyone who believes. What God really wants is for all people who are suffering in their sins to hear the gospel, repent and receive new life. With a broken shepherd's heart, he sent his apostles back to the temple courts to tell the full message of this new life.

How did the apostles respond to the angel's command? Look at verse 21a. "At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people." They did not delay. As soon as the temple opened in the early morning, the apostles went in and began to teach the word of God to the people. The word of God was preached and dying souls received new life. God was pleased.

Second, "We must obey God rather than men" (21b-39).

Several hours later, around 9:30 a.m., the high priest and his associates called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel. They wanted to humiliate the apostles of Jesus before as many dignitaries as possible. After assembling, they practiced before the mirrors looking stern and full of contempt. Then they sent for the apostles. But the apostles were not in the prison! It was embarrassing for them, especially for the captain of the temple guard. They had to admit that they could not shackle the apostles. Then someone reported that the apostles were standing in the temple courts teaching the people. It was the very thing the religious leaders wanted to prevent. This was God's one-two punch to the religious leaders. In this way, God revealed that he was in control of things and he was holding the apostles in his hand. It was a clear message to the religious leaders. But the captain of the temple guard, fearing for his job, went into the temple courts and asked the apostles to please come before the Sanhedrin. He did not dare use force because ordinary people recognized the apostles as God's servants, just as they had recognized Jesus as their good shepherd. Behind closed doors, the high priest tried to threaten the apostles, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood" (28). His words tell us that the apostles had worked hard and courageously to preach the gospel all over Jerusalem. His

words tell us that the religious leaders began to feel convicted by the truth. Nevertheless, his words were a threat. How did the apostles respond?

Look at verse 29. "Peter and the other apostles replied: 'We must obey God rather than men!'" When he released them from the prison, the angel of the Lord had told them to go and preach in the temple courts. Peter and the other apostles had simply obeyed God's word. Peter was very clear that he must obey God rather than men. Peter knew that the religious leaders were full of hatred and ready to do evil. But he did not fear men. He was ready to obey God at the risk of his life. Not only Peter, but all the apostles were ready to obey God at the risk of their lives. The contents of their message explain why they were so courageous.

Look at verses 30-32. "The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." The worst thing the religious leaders could do was kill the body. And they could do this only if God allowed them to. But God can raise the dead. God raised Jesus and exalted him to his own right hand. God made Jesus Prince and Savior. God made Jesus the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. God made Jesus the King of kings and Lord of lords. The apostles knew they had eternal life in their souls. They knew the kingdom of God was theirs in Christ. When they had this assurance in their hearts they were fearless. Moreover, they had the Holy Spirits in their hearts. When they obeyed the angel's message, the Holy Spirit came upon them and burned in their hearts. The Holy Spirit purified their love for God. In their pure love for God there was no fear. They had a sense of conquest and victory in their hearts.

Here we learn the character of the Spirit of God. God does not compromise with evil men. God wants to bring them to repentance; God wants unconditional surrender. God wants to exalt the gospel of Christ above all worldly power because only Jesus saves. The gospel of Jesus is absolute. Those who hear must repent or they will perish. Sooner or later, all men must decide to stand with Jesus or they will stand against Jesus. There is no middle ground. Coexistence was not an option; the religious leaders had to repent or they would perish.

When the religious leaders heard this, they were furious. They wanted to kill the apostles. They probably tore their silk garments and snarled viciously, baring sharp incisors like angry dogs. Their murderous inner persons were evident to all. The apostles were in danger. But God used a renowned Pharisee named Gamaliel to reason with them. His decision to put the disciples outside and his carefully constructed argument based on the history of failed messianic movements restored some sanity to the gathering. Actually, he did not take a stand on either side. Nevertheless, something he said is quite interesting: "...you will not be able to stop these men." This was true. The gospel message and the power of the Holy Spirit could not be confined by a jail or squelched by a kangaroo court. The gospel is the truth of God. The Holy Spirit is the power of God. Nothing can stop the advance of the gospel. What really matters is the attitude of God's servants toward his words, "Go, stand, and tell the full message of new life." We must obey the command to preach the gospel and trust in God. Then God works with power through the Holy Spirit.

Third, they never stopped preaching the gospel (40-42).

Though the religious leaders decided to release the apostles, they had them flogged first. It must have been quite painful for the apostles. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let

them go. Look at verse 41. “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.” It is a divine mystery. Suffering for the gospel did not make the disciples gloomy. It filled them with heavenly joy—spiritual joy that satisfies the soul. God recognized them as his precious and holy children in this sinsick world. When they participated in the suffering of Christ, they had great assurance that they would share the glory of Christ.

Look at verse 42. “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 Christ.” The apostles used every day as a precious opportunity to preach the gospel of Jesus. They continued to teach in the temple courts boldly and courageously. They also went from house to house. Their message was, “Jesus is the Christ.” Here we learn that persecution did not hinder the gospel from spreading. Persecution was like pure oxygen to a burning fire. It only made the fire burn brighter and hotter. The gospel of Jesus was spreading rapidly throughout Jerusalem and the surrounding area.

We learn from the apostles that we must do our best to preach the gospel every day. Many of us are students. We must study hard and get the UBF average on our report cards. Many of us have to work hard at our jobs. Still, we can do something for Christ every day by inviting one person to know Jesus. If we do this day after day, we can introduce more than 20,000 people to Jesus during our lifetimes. We must never stop teaching the gospel of Jesus. We must preach the gospel on each campus in the Chicago area. We must preach the gospel from house to house. Soon, our UIC coworkers will not have a Bible house for one-to-one. So they must have Bible studies and fellowship meetings house by house, like Moscow coworkers did when they had no Bible house. May God bless our fall semester one-to-one ministry abundantly.