

2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters

Sermon Series - The Book of Acts/God's Plan for His Church

Sermon Title - Expect Opposition

Sermon Text - Acts 5:15-42

Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

Introduction

"Better is one day in Your house, Better is one day in Your courts Than thousands elsewhere!" And when the world hears you sing that they just might think you've lost your mind! They may say, "Are you kidding, better is one day in the house of God than a thousand in the world? You've got to be kidding me!" And then the world will try to entice you with their ideas of what is better than! And when you decide to follow Jesus instead of their ways, you can expect opposition. But your attitude should reflect that you're not ashamed, not afraid, not angry, and not Arrogant. Let's pray and I'll explain why from a chapter from the history of the New Testament Church! Let's pray!

Years ago when two of my three children attended LSU they became acquainted with what is known on the LSU campus as "Free Speech Alley." This is a place where anybody can stand up and say anything they want too. There were some people that would come to the campus and go there to preach their message. However, they didn't preach like Jesus, or Peter or Paul, they came to condemn people by pointing their fingers and screaming at the college students who would gather to gawk at them. They were angry and arrogant! These people became known as "The Crazy Christians!" They would many times bring their children as young as 6-12 years old, dressed in suits and they would get those little kids to walk up to the college students with a Bible in one hand and with pointed fingers on the other hand and to yell out to the college kids that they were going to hell. Such a sad thing. And of course, those kinds of people get the press many times and the attention. While I can't judge their hearts, I can say that their effectiveness of winning people to Jesus was poor or non-existent. In fact they made a lot of people not even want to consider Jesus. That's so sad because those people do not represent the attitude or heart of Jesus! And here's a sad thing: Some Christians are afraid to share their faith at all for fear of being labeled one of those "crazy Christians." But we need people who care about others enough to share the gospel in love with people who are lost and trapped in Satan's deception! We've allowed the pressures of our secular culture to cause us to fear being an outcast or out of the loop when it comes to coolness! I know there are some obnoxious, mean spirited people out there that give Christianity a bad name, however, you and I should do all we can to change that. We should not be ashamed, afraid, angry or arrogant. Here's the thing, if I'm doing the right things for Christ, for the right reasons, and in the right way, if people think I'm a crazy Christian, that's okay, let them think what they want. If they think I'm a crazy Christian because I'm not being Christlike in the way I present my message then shame on me! But here's the truth: We need to recapture the passion and the fire of the New Testament Church. If we truly believe that Jesus came to earth and gave His life for the sins of humanity, if we truly believe that Jesus showed us a better way to live, if we truly believe that Jesus wants to show the lonely, misdirected and hurting people of this world His love, we must recapture the passion and the fire that was present in the New Testament Church. Of course, if we do this

there will be those who won't like our message and will reject it. And some of those people will even go on the offensive and attack. It happened to the followers of Christ in the New Testament Church. Today we will look at an incident that took place in the early church and from this story, we'll learn 11 lessons that apply to our church and our lives today. I don't expect you to memorize or to remember all of these, but there may be one or two that you can relate to. If so, remember those things and ask God to help you overcome any opposition that comes your way! Our story today is the second time the apostles were imprisoned for teaching about Jesus.

Here's the Eleven Lessons

Expect an attack
God will respond
God will instruct
The disciples obey
The enemy responds
The disciples preach
The enemy is outraged
God maintains control
Followers of Jesus are sometimes persecuted
The disciples rejoice even in their suffering
The disciples remain faithful

Lesson #1 - Expect an Attack

Remember that God was doing some amazing work amongst the followers of Christ. Last week we talked about the miracles that God was doing in the New Testament Church. Luke tells us this...

Acts 5:15 As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by.

Acts 5:16 Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

Acts 5:17 Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.

Acts 5:18 They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.

Satan is insanely jealous and he definitely throws temper tantrums! You've got to expect the attacks to come because Satan is not going to sit idly by and let us reach Slidell for Christ! Then - In the New Testament Church Satan attacked through outsiders and the threat was physical (jail, beatings, and sometimes death)

Now – There are parts of the world where people are still being jailed, beaten and sometimes killed for their faith in Jesus! Here in America, Satan may attack physically, but it is more likely to be spiritual in nature and may come from within.

From within the Body of Christ (quarrels, dissension, etc)

James warns us about this...

James 4:1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

We need to make sure our hearts and our desires are right! This is critical not only for our relationships within the church, but also for our own spiritual well being. The reason is that Satan will also attack you...

From within your own life (temptations, discouragement, doubts, etc)

James also warns us about this...

James 3:14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

James 3:15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.

James 3:16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

And of course, just like in the New Testament attacks may come from without...

From the world (Putdowns, ridicule, not allowing you in their circles and making you feel like an outcast)

James gives us some wisdom about what to do when this happens...

James 1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, James 1:3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

James 1:4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

If you follow James' advice then your attitude should reflect that you're not ashamed, not afraid, not angry, and not Arrogant. And now, back to our story of the New Testament Church. The apostles had been arrested and put in jail. The disciples' faith was certainly being tested through the opposition they were facing, but here's...

Lesson #2 - God will Respond

Acts 5:19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.

There will always be provision in persecution/God never forsakes His own! He sends an angel of the Lord to open the doors of the prison! Whatever you are facing in your life right now, especially if it is opposition, you need to trust that God will respond! He can open doors if He needs to free you and He can close doors if He needs to protect you!

If the opposition is from without, we can remember what the Psalmist wrote...

Psa 9:11 Sing praises to the LORD, enthroned in Zion; proclaim among the nations what he has done.

Psa 9:12 For he who avenges blood remembers; he does not ignore the cry of the afflicted.

Psa 9:13 O LORD, see how my enemies persecute me! Have mercy and lift me up from the gates of death,

Psa 9:14 that I may declare your praises in the gates of the Daughter of Zion and there rejoice in your salvation.

If the opposition is from within the Body of Christ (quarrels, dissention, etc) remember to love one another and to pray for one another. We don't always have to agree with one another, but we do have to love one another. That's a requirement! Jesus said this...

John 13:34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

John 13:35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

If the opposition is from within ourselves we remember Paul's instructions...

1 Cor 10:12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

1 Cor 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

And here's what we always need to be paying attention to any time we are going through tough times in our lives...

Lesson #3 - God will Instruct

Acts 5:20 "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life."

Why would God give instructions that He knew would lead to persecution? Because the message is a message of life! It's not just about heaven or hell, it is about life here and now. We have a message that could radically transform our world for the better. "Tell the people the full message of this new life." And just what was the message of Jesus Christ?

Let's just let Him tell us in His own words...

Mat 5:1 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him,

Mat 5:2 and he began to teach them, saying:

Mat 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Mat 5:4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Mat 5:5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Mat 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Mat 5:7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Mat 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Mat 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Mat 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Mat 5:11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Mat 5:12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Mat 5:13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

Mat 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

Mat 5:15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

Mat 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

So in our story God frees the apostles and then tells them to go back and do the same thing that got them put in jail in the first place. Why? The message was so important for the world to hear! And once again, God did not want the disciples to be ashamed, afraid, angry or arrogant about their situation. And there's a powerful lesson for us in the next verse.

Lesson #4 - The Disciples Obey

Acts 5:21 At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

Are you willing to obey no matter the cost? True discipleship is costly, but it is so worth it! The benefits of being obedient to God's instructions far outweigh any cost! Jesus had previously pointed this out to His disciples ...

John 15:10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

John 15:11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

John 15:12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

John 15:14 You are my friends if you do what I command.

John 15:15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

And once again we can expect opposition. In fact...

Lesson #5 - The Enemy Responds

Acts 5:21 At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin--the full assembly of the elders of Israel--and sent to the jail for the apostles.

Acts 5:22 But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported,

Acts 5:23 "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside."

Acts 5:24 On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this.

Acts 5:25 Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people."

Acts 5:26 At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

Acts 5:27 Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest.

Acts 5:28 "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

Our obedience will always bring about a response from the enemy

He will taunt you

He will threaten you

He will ridicule you

He will intimidate you

He will question your obedience

He will twist the truth

But we know that God will not instruct us to follow Him and to obey Him unless He intends to give us what we need to do so. Peter gives us some powerful wisdom about being obedient and how God will bless our obedience! Peter says...

1 Pet 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

1 Pet 5:9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

1 Pet 5:10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

1 Pet 5:11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

And I love how these words which Peter had written years after our story reflect the very attitude the apostles exhibited in our story. As we look at the next lesson we will see that the apostles when questioned were not ashamed, afraid, angry, or arrogant, just passionate about their message.

Lesson #6 - The Disciples Preach

Acts 5:29 Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!

Acts 5:30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead--whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.

Acts 5:31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.

Acts 5:32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

What a message! Just like Peter and the other apostles we need to stand our ground and preach the truth, but to always have a Christlike attitude. We should not be ashamed, afraid, angry or arrogant! But we should be confident in Christ like Paul the apostle who would later write...

1 Cor 2:4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,

1 Cor 2:5 so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

1 Cor 2:6 We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

1 Cor 2:7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

1 Cor 2:8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

But here's the problem, when Peter and the other apostles are preaching in our story, they are talking to some of the rulers of the age that Paul was referring to who had crucified the Lord and here's...

Lesson #7 - The Enemy is Outraged

Acts 5:33 When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.

Satan hates the truth and so do his followers. The enemies of Jesus were constantly outraged at Him and on numerous occasions sought to stone Him. We need to understand that it may

happen to us. Sometimes the world will just ignore you, or just ridicule you, but sometimes people of the world are so offended by your message even when you are loving and kind with the way you deliver your message, they will become outraged. Sometimes the conviction of The Holy Spirit evokes that kind of response from those who have hardened their hearts against God. So sad! Jesus told His disciples this...

John 15:18 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

John 15:19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

John 15:20 Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.

John 15:21 They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.

And here's the way they treated Jesus even before the crucifixion...

John 8:58 "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"

John 8:59 At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

But never forget that even when they had nailed Jesus to the cross, Jesus still didn't become angry or arrogant, but prayed this...

Luke 23:33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.

Luke 23:34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

And in that very act of praying for the ones who had crucified Him, we learn...

Lesson #8 – God Maintains Control

No one took Jesus' life, He gave it willingly! And we must never forget that God is God and He is in control of our fate. Whether we live another day or are put to death for our faith. He can even use the lost to accomplish His will!

Listen to our story...

Acts 5:34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while.

Acts 5:35 Then he addressed them: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men.

Acts 5:36 Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing.

Acts 5:37 After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered.

Acts 5:38 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.

Acts 5:39 But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

Acts 5:40 His speech persuaded them...

Folks, when we realize that God maintains control no matter the opposition that comes our way we can have an attitude of not being ashamed, not being afraid, not being angry, and not being arrogant. Even though we must learn this difficult...

Lesson #9 - Followers of Jesus are sometimes Persecuted

Acts 5:40 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.

God is ultimately in control and God used Gamaliel to convince the mob not to kill the apostles, however, they were still flogged. We are not always delivered from suffering, persecution, troubles and trials. However, we are given several promises...

Heb 13:5 ...God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

Heb 13:6 So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

And Jesus said...

Mat 28:20 ... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

And so we learn from the these members of the New Testament Church...

Lesson #10 - The Disciples Rejoice even in their Suffering

Acts 5:41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.

Saint Peter would later write these words of encouragement to us...

1 Pet 4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

1 Pet 4:13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

1 Pet 4:14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

And now our final lesson...

Lesson #11 - The Disciples Remain Faithful

Acts 5:42 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.

With a building, without a building, persecuted or in times of peace let us never stop “teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.” Let it be said that we were faithful to follow our Lord’s instructions regardless of the opposition for we know...

Romans 6:4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Romans 6:5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Romans 6:6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—

Romans 6:7 because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Romans 6:8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

I hope these lessons have taught you that like the apostles we should have an attitude of not being ashamed of Jesus because He gave His life for us, and we should have an attitude of no fear because God is ultimately in control of us, and we should have an attitude that is not angry with those who persecute us because without Jesus that would be us, and we should have an attitude without arrogance because it is Jesus and not us who saves us!

Let’s pray!