

Message Date: 08-16-20

To the Ends of the Earth- ACTS Part 3: Things get real!

Message Title: Week 4, Fighting against God

– **Last week, talked about “QUESTION OF OBEDIENCE”... On trial before the Sanhedrin, faced with choice of obeying ‘men’- the Sanhedrin- and go free... OR, obeying God and facing persecution, the apostles chose God.**

²⁹ Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings!

– **Sense of ... “how could we not?” He is our very life...**

– **NOW, as story continues, another question comes to forefront. Not explicitly stated in text but its presence is clear. This is...**

† **The question of CONFIDENCE Specifically, can we have confidence in GOD?**

– **If we are faithful in our obedience to God (or you know, the best we can do), can we be confident of God’s faithfulness to us?**

– **Sounds heretical to ask! We would immediately say ‘of course God is faithful!’ He is GOD! AND indeed, scripture proclaims God’s faithfulness, from Genesis to Revelation...**

Psalm 89:7-9 *Who is like you, LORD God Almighty?*

You, LORD, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you.

1 Corinthians 10:12-14 *And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.*

– **Old great hymn... “Great is thy faithfulness, oh God my father, there is no shadow of turning with thee... Thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not, As thou has been, thou forever will be...**

– **But here’s the reality... we can doubt Gods faithfulness all the time,**

○ **When we look at our circumstances with fear... not with wise caution, but with true fear, where we have no peace, filled with anxiety...**

○ **When we believe enemies lies that things are hopeless**

○ **If our life is a mess, maybe we’ve made huge mistakes, and we believe another lie... God can’t forgive me, accept me, I’m too far gone.**

1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

– **When we think we are all alone, that maybe God has turned his back on us, doesn’t care about what we are going through**

Hebrews 13:5-6 “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”⁶ So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”

– **THAT was perspective of the Apostles... Along with community of faith, they were totally confident of Gods faithfulness, that he was at work, and he would accomplish his purposes in and through them.**

– **This confidence was at the foundation of the courage, obedience, and JOY in which they daily lived out the goodness and truth of the Gospel, and with which the Apostles stood boldly before the Sanhedrin in the face of persecution.**

– **AND IN ONE OF THE GREAT IRONIES of the entire historical narrative that is the book of Acts, the utmost confidence of God faithfulness- that HE would accomplish his purposes- this wasn’t proclaimed by the Apostles ...NO.. it was proclaimed by a member of the Sanhedrin, the very group who would find themselves fighting against God.**

– **THIS LEADS US TO OUR STORY... Acts 5:29-42.**

– **FIRST.. TODAY IS SUNDAY, AUGUST 16th... Pastor E, welcome to Trinity online**

– **As we pick up the story, the Apostles proclaim the reason for their confidence... it is also...**

✠ **Our reason for confidence**

³⁰ *The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. ³¹ God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. ³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”*

– **Reality of Jesus death. Historic debate of who really killed Jesus. Romans... Jewish leaders... People of Jerusalem... ultimately it was US. Sin of humanity that Christ bore upon himself.. an act of God because of his great love for us.**

– **Greater reality of Jesus resurrection. God raised Jesus from the dead, defeating death and ushering in a NEW LIFE for all who believe and follow Him.**

– **“God exalted Him to his own right hand...” Ascension... reality that Jesus is God, he sits with God in total victory over sin and death**

– **Peter goes on to make a very significant statement.. “that he-Jesus- might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins.”**

– **At this time, the focus of the Gospel- what God is doing- is to offer repentance and forgiveness to ISRAEL. LOTS could talk about here, but...**

- **Israel, as a nation/people, is going to reject the gospel... as a result**
- **God is going to open the gospel to the rest of the world... gentiles...**
- **As that happens, God will reveal to Paul and to us- how the fullness of the Gospel is bigger than forgiveness, and encompasses the even greater truth of God’s Grace- our union with Christ, and Christ’s life in us... miracle that because we’ve been forgiven, Christ has become our very life.**

– **Then the apostles proclaimed “WE ARE WITNESS OF THIS”... implied message to Sanhedrin is YOU ARE TO. We all know this happened!... NOT ONLY are we witnesses to Christ’s resurrection, but God has given His VERY SPIRIT- his presence- to those who obey him.**

– **Apostles... WHY ARE WE CONFIDENT?**

- **Because CHRIST went to his death to pay the price of our sin**
- **Through CHRIST we have received forgiveness and new life**
- **CHRIST defeated death and rose from the dead by power of God**
- **CHRIST ascended to heaven, seated with God, as God**
- **The very spirit of Christ has been given to us, who have responded to God with the obedience of faith**

– **NOT SO SUBTLE STATEMENT to Sanhedrin... God hasn’t given his spirit to YOU... because rather than responding in obedience to Christ, you are rejecting him.**

– **SO, as you can imagine, the Sanhedrin is furious.**

³³ *When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.*

- **The evidence for everything the apostles just said is overwhelming! But these religious rulers don't see it, because they are blinded by their jealousy, anger, pride, and desire for self-protection.**
- **THIS brings us to the fascinating scene involving a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a member of the Sanhedrin...**

† The wisdom of Gamaliel

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

- **Do you see where Gamaliel is going? Mobs and movements come and go... you kill the ringleader, you kill the movement. SO, if Jesus is really dead as you say.. you have nothing to fear... these are just a bunch of humans... God has nothing to do with this... right?**

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

- **Implication- if you fight against God, you will lose!**
- **People have wondered where Gamaliel is coming from. Was he a believer himself? Or was he just a wise and pragmatic leader who saw the evidence of what was happening? We don't know... but the truth of what he said is powerful. To the Sanhedrin, it was a caution, a warning. BUT for US, for followers of Christ, a great source of encouragement.**
- **People are capable of accomplishing amazing things- at least from our perspective. We can do amazing things, and cause amazing harm. But ultimately, the best- and worst- that humans can do is simply that. The best that we can do... and by definition, it is TEMPORARY. It doesn't last.**
- **History bears this out, and scripture attests to it... Isaiah 40:6-8**
*"All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.
⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."*
- **This of course is Gamaliel's greater point. If the movement of Christ followers there in Jerusalem was just a human phenomenon, it would not last. It would fail. BUT, EVEN MORE, if it was OF GOD, there would be no stopping it. IT WOULD ENDURE all the persecution, threats, and punishment they could throw against it. AND IT DID, as we, the body of Christ, are here to this day.**
- **How can we be encouraged by this?**

† May we be encouraged!

- *It's easy to look around and become profoundly discouraged by our world today. So many problems, seemingly intractable... real issues. So much anger, animosity, divisiveness. Christ, and his good news, increasingly held in open contempt by many people. Political Chaos.*
- *People say... OH! What are we going to do if Trump wins!*
- *Other say.... OH! What are we going to do if Biden wins!*
- *I don't know what America's going to do after this election, but I do know something God will do. HIS PURPOSES WILL PREVAIL. HIS WORK WILL CONTINUE. NOTHING WILL SURPRISE HIM. HE WILL NOT BE HINDERED.*
- *AND.. CHRIST will call us, as his followers, his beloved children, to continue to TRUST HIM, FOLLOW HIM, EXPERIENCE HIS strength, Joy and Goodness, AND JOIN HIM in his work of redeeming people out of darkness and into his freedom, hope, life, and light!*
- *CHURCH! MAY WE HEAR.. when our life, our activity, is FROM GOD... born out of our trust and obedience, our love and relationship with Jesus... God's work through us will not fail.*
- *BUT That brings up the question. HOW DO WE KNOW our thoughts, our activity is OF GOD?*

‡ The question! How do we know that our thoughts, our activity is OF GOD?

- *There are entire studies devoted to that question... Experiencing God... many others. Entire NT speaks to this question... just touching on it here. In fact, just one thought.*

God's activity in our life is born out of our RELATIONSHIP with Christ.

- *Think of marriage. Who Lisa is, her activity, is felt in my life, and expressed in my life, every day. Who I am, my activity, is experience and expressed in her life, every day. Why? Because we are married! We experience life together. NOT ALWAYS easy, or even pretty.. but we can't help but influence and direct each others lives... IN CHRIST, we are ONE, and our union that God created is experienced through our relationship.*
- *We tend to way overthink the idea of knowing God's will, direction, in our lives. We try to read God like a roadmap, or a puzzle. But it all comes down to relationship, and the trust and love that flows from that relationship.*
- *AS OUR HEARTS truly are growing in our love of God, our trust of him, our relationship with him... then we will come to recognize HIS activity in different ways...*
 - *Through his Word. Through Scripture. I know that God's activity through me will always be an expression of His love to others? What does that look like? Well, I can go read 1 Corinthians. Love is Kind, Patient, humble, honest, hopeful, not proud, not easily angered, honoring and desiring best for others. Whatever is going on in my life, I know that God's activity will look like THAT. Fruit of the spirit...*
 - *Through being an active part of the body. The wise counsel of other spirit led believers. Hebrews 10:24 says "let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and*

good deeds” Let us be a part of each others lives... God will use us to encourage and spur.. move each other forward as God works in us and reveals himself to us.

- *Sincere prayer. Seeking God above all else, setting aside our own agendas and sincerely looking to him, confessing our trust to him.*

- *In Romans 12, Paul describes in this way the life- the setting of our mind- that looks first to God as our source of life itself...*

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, **(self centeredness, self dependence, pride)** but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. **(That is picture of a surrendered and trusting relationship with God!)** Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

- *But what about when God’s activity in us and through us, leads us to follow him into places, and activity, that is HARD! That is BEYOND US! The ending of Acts 5 is such a picture... and here we see the miracle that even as the Apostles faced true persecution and suffering because of their faith, their response was JOY. JOY not because their lives had suddenly become very hard, but Joy in the thrill of knowing they were part of the work of God.*

✠ Relationship with God... Confidence in God... Trust in God... Obedience to God... The Joy of God.

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

- *Think back to last week. That kind of courage, trust, obedience, JOY... that doesn’t from obligation, guilt, or fear. That confidence in the faithfulness of God is a picture of the PRESENCE AND GOODNESS OF GOD, alive, animating, and filling the lives of those first believers, just as God seeks to fill, animate, and live out HIS PRESENCE AND GOODNES in our lives today.*
- *I want to end with some scripture that speaks... shouts out.. the confidence that is OURS IN CHRIST... our confidence in Gods faithfulness as we follow him...*

✠ Shouts of confidence!

2 Corinthians 3:4-5 *Such confidence we have through Christ before God. ⁵ Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.*

Ephesians 3:12 *In him (Christ) and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.*

Hebrews 4:15-16 *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

Hebrews 11:1 *Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

Hebrews 13:5-6 *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”⁶ So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”*

1 John 5:14-15 *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.*

Philippians 1:6 *being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

Romans 4:20-22 *Yet he (Abraham) did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God (he didn't lose confidence in God's faithfulness), but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*

- **Friends, God can be trusted. In the face of an uncertain world, we can be confident of God's faithfulness to us, and through us, as he accomplishes HIS purposes, and calls us to follow him.**