



Sunday, September 3, 2023

Speaker: Pastor John VanderWindt

Scripture: Acts 5:12-42, Romans 8:31b

Sermon: God Will Complete His Work

The Lord's Supper

Good morning. It is good to be together in the house of the Lord and to continue to look at His Word. Today we are going to continue in the book of Acts. We have been studying this summer the book of Acts and looking at how the early church is a model for how we do church. You see throughout the ages of how the church has developed this concept of community, of fellowship, of the breaking of bread - which we will do in communion after the service - and of living our lives for God. Today we look at Acts 5. I invite you to take out your Bibles or your phones and turn to Acts 5. We're going to begin at verse 12.

Just to kind of catch us up as to what has happened so far in Acts, back in **Acts 1**, we have the gathering of the disciples after Jesus is taken up to heaven and Jesus tells them that they are going to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth. They choose a new apostle to replace Judas Iscariot.

Then in **Acts 2**, we have the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes and fills the apostles' lives and we see a continuous phrase that begins to happen at that point where it says, "And God added to their number." At first, it begins to give us numbers and today we'll see that again as the church grows. And then numbers are no longer important. It is the work of the Spirit, rather than the number of believers. So in chapter two, we have this great address from Peter, in which he says, "The gospel summarized an ending with the death and resurrection of Christ."

In **Acts 3**, Peter heals someone. Then in **Acts 4**, he gets taken before the leaders and they tell him he needs to be quiet and that he can no longer preach in the name of Jesus. They give him an order to be quiet. At the end of Acts 4, we have the gift of generosity being displayed by the early church. This concept of how we need to care for each other. For those of us who have, how we can sacrifice what we have to give to those who don't have so that all in the body of Christ have what they need.

Then in **Acts 5**, as we looked at a couple of weeks ago, at the beginning of chapter five, there's a story of Ananias and Sapphira, in which we see how, within the church, there are sometimes wrong motivations that come up and Satan can use those. Where it becomes more about me and my pride than it does about the church and what God is doing.

So that's where we've left off a couple of weeks ago. Today we pick up in **Acts 5:12-42**.

12 The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. [We've seen that phrase as well. "Many signs and wonders," has often been there.] And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. **13** No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. **14** Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. **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. **16** Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

17 Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. **18** They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. **19** But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. **20** "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life." **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. **22** But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, **23** "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." **24** On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

25 Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people." **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. **27** The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. **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."

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

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

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.

This is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You, Lord, for the gift of Your Word. Lord, we thank You that we may freely gather to hear Your Word being spoken. Lord, we pray that as we gather today, that You will open our ears and that You will mold our hearts to hear You and to be loved by You. To seek you in all that we do. Lord, may the word spoken be Your words and none of mine and that You may be honored and glorified. In Jesus' precious name. Amen.

So here we are today. We are gathering and we look at the story of Peter and the apostles. We find it is almost a replication of **Acts 4** where Peter and the apostles were also taken by the leaders and told to no longer preach. This time they're taken by the leaders and they are put in jail. So it's a little bit more serious than the last time. They're put in jail after we see them teaching in the temple, and we see the works of the Holy Spirit happening. It is interesting that as we read along, it says in **Acts 5:15**, "**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." This goes to show that people understood the power which came through the Holy Spirit in Peter and how his mere presence reflected the presence of God.

We may recall when Jesus was on earth and he was walking along, there was a time in which he was going to heal somebody and all of a sudden he stopped. He says to the crowd, "Who touched me?" And the disciples are like, "Seriously, Jesus? The crowd is pushing all around you. What do you mean, "Who touched me?" Jesus says, "No, who touched me?" And we find the story of the woman who touched the edge of his garment and was healed. In that same way, just being in the presence of Christ brought healing.

So now we get this story where it says that the people are hoping that the shadow of Peter would heal them. We don't know whether the shadow of Peter actually healed everybody, although we read later on that people brought them from all over and they were all healed. But it's interesting that it talks about the shadow presence. Right? What does it mean that the shadow of a person who is in relationship with God can bring healing? Have you thought about that? Have you thought about what your shadow brings to those around you? Have you thought about how your presence in a room either reflects or does not reflect Christ?

Bishop Woodford says, "We all exert unconscious influence, and thus, even in our spheres of secular life, we affect one another. (1) Our voluntary efforts are only occasional and interrupted, while our unconscious energy is everywhere operative and constant. (2) Our constant and silent energy is most expressive of our real character... "

So as we go along in our daily walk, what reflection of Christ are we giving? Are we giving a reflection in which people are saying, "I am longing to be in your shadow because in your shadow, I see the presence of God." Or are we reflecting our shadow side of sin and people are drawn to that?

C.S. Lewis says, "When we Christians behave badly, or fail to behave well, we are making Christianity unbelievable to the outside world." How often have we lived our lives making the Lordship of Christ unbelievable to those around us?

So in this story that we get into, of Peter teaching and the apostles teaching, let us remind ourselves that it is not just the proclamation of our words, but it is our everyday actions which show and reflect the gospel in the life of Christ. So Peter and the apostles have been teaching. In **Acts 5:17**, it says, "**17** Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy." This jealousy is more than just a, "Wow, I wish I could have that." This is a jealousy which is that same desire of wanting to kill them. Later on, it says that they wanted to kill them. **Acts 5:33**, "**33** When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death." You can see the anger in them. In that verse of wanting to put them to death in **Acts 33**, it is the same phrase which is used by the Sanhedrin and the Sadducees. When they talk about wanting to put Jesus to death, it is that same intense piece of desiring to kill this movement, this life of Christ.

So they arrested the apostles. They put them in jail. While they're in jail, we see the power of God. It says in **Acts 5:22-23**, "**22** But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, **23** "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." And as we have read, an angel of the Lord let them out. Now let's think about that for a moment in a broader sense. The apostles were put into prison for living a life and preaching about the name of Jesus. We have a prison system as well. When we're put into prison in our system, it is because we've done something wrong. Here the angels free them from the prison for living a life of Christ. But it's done in a miraculous way in which they are suddenly freed.

As I was preparing this week, a thought came to mind, thinking about the prisons which we live in ourselves. Some of them we have put ourselves in by our actions. Have we ever thought of praying and asking the Holy Spirit to release us from those prisons as well? That we may freely boldly preach the Word of God, that we are not held captive by the prisons that we have made for ourselves or that others have put us in, which refrain us from preaching the power of God? We too need to look at, "Where do we need to be released from our prisons?"

And the angel tells them to go and preach again. So in the morning, when they are gathered again in the temple, that is where the high priests and the whole group find them. And you might say, "You know, after you've been released from prison because of preaching the name, next time you may want to just say, 'Let's do it quietly someplace else.'" But the angel says, "No, go and gather again in the same place where they've always been gathering Solomon's colonnade [which is a section of the temple] and meet with the people and proclaim My name."

So they do and they gather and proclaim the name of Christ. That is where they are found. Then they are brought to the high priest. In bringing them to the high priest, notice how it says in **Acts 5:26**, "26 They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them." This is quite different than the way they took Jesus.

In the Garden of Gethsemane late at night, they came in secret and used force to grab Jesus and Jesus freely went with them. In fact, when his disciples tried to rebel and fight, Jesus said no. And he went with them. Notice how the apostles do the same even though it is in the daytime. They do not resist. They simply go with them. They are then accused of disobeying the order to be quiet.

It says in **Acts 5:28, 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." There is something notably missing in **Acts 5:28**. That is the name of Jesus. Notice how the Sanhedrin or the leaders do not call on or acknowledge Jesus as a person.

They simply say, "We told you not to preach in this name. And you are making us guilty of this man's blood. We don't even want to acknowledge the fact that he is who he is. But we're going to hold you accountable for creating this issue."

It's interesting, when you look at this piece where it says, "You are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." Let me go back to **Matthew 27:24-25**. With this same group of leaders, it says, "24 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" 25 All the people answered, "His blood is on us and on our children!"

Now, all of a sudden, the same people who were getting everybody to say, "We'll be responsible," are saying, "Hold on, don't hold us responsible for this. Don't make us be guilty of this piece. Don't spread rumors that we killed Jesus." So they're not even willing to acknowledge where they were before. So Peter stands up and he says in **Acts 5:29**, "We must obey God rather than human beings." This sounds familiar to what we have said in **Acts 4** where it's Peter saying the same phrase. Except in Acts 4, he asks it as a question, "Should we obey God or should we obey people? You be the judge." And now, he's at a place where it's like, "No, we're not even going to give you that option anymore. You need to know that we are going to obey God."

Then he says in **Acts 5:30**, "**30** The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead... " The God of our ancestors. Peter is acknowledging that the God of the Jews is the one who's raised Jesus from the dead. It is that same image which appears in **Acts 13:22-23**, where he says, "**22** After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.' **23** "From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised." So here, Peter is making that connection between David and Jesus as the one whom God has raised up as the King of the universe. Then he says in **Acts 5:30**, "... whom you killed by hanging him on a cross." So there he is, again, holding them accountable.

But we need to stop there for just a moment. We need to remember that the whole aspect of Jesus hanging on the cross is part of God's will. God purposed and planned for it to happen the way it did.

Throughout history, there have been times in which people have been accusing the Jews for killing Jesus. And yes, that happened. But maybe we should be saying, "Thank you for being part of God's will." If Jesus had not died on the cross, where would we be today? There would be no forgiveness of sins. It is what we will celebrate with the Lord's Supper afterwards, where Jesus talks about His broken body and His blood that covers us. And we say with the people, "May his blood be on us and our children in a very different way, because for us, it is that cleansing power of forgiveness. So we need to remember that we, as Christians, come out of Judaism and we also need to talk about the God of our ancestors. The God that we serve is the God who called Abraham out of Ur to make people. We have been adopted into that family, as our Father.

And it says, "... whom you killed on a cross." Being killed on a cross is seen as a curse in the Old Testament. In **Deuteronomy 21:23**, it talks about the aspect of anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed by God. And later on in **Galatians 3:13**, the apostle Paul says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." So God's plan through this whole piece was to take our curse, the curse which we deserve, and place it on our Lord.

So here we have Peter talking about how they've killed him. But God in **Acts 5:31**, "**31** God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins." There's a connection between repentance and forgiveness. But that connection also includes the first part with the Prince and Savior. We cannot have Jesus as our Savior if we are not willing to repent. We cannot have Jesus as our Lord if we don't also repent and notice that we need Him in all areas of our lives. For Jesus to be Lord and Savior, He has to be in all areas. When we repent, then we get forgiveness.

There's a saying, "You know, sometimes I'll do it and I'll ask for forgiveness later." Sometimes that works but that's not what Peter is talking about. Peter is talking about, "You begin by living for Christ." As you sin, you ask out of repentance for forgiveness, and make that as your life.

Then it says in **Acts 5:32**, "**32** We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." Peter and the apostles spoke of what they had seen. They spoke of how they had seen Jesus being raised from the dead and how he has healed and worked in their lives. And we see evidence of that by the many signs and wonders that have happened. And that is what they are telling the people. When it says that the Holy Spirit has been given to those who obey Him, each of us also has been given the Holy Spirit and we are encouraged to share what we have witnessed by the Holy Spirit.

So when there is healing, whether that is emotional, or physical, or relational, whatever healing there is, we should be sharing that with our brothers and sisters by saying, "Here is the power of God and the many signs and wonders which He continues to do in our world today."

Then in **Acts 5:33**, it says, "**33** When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death." As I said before, that is the same phrase which is used for wanting to put Jesus to death. It's also the same phrase which is used by Herod in wanting to put the boys in Bethlehem to death. It is this utmost desire to murder. And that's where they were. But a man named Gamaliel stands up. You may recognize the name Gamaliel from elsewhere. Paul talks about Gamaliel as his teacher. Gamaliel was one of the head Pharisees.

So now we had the whole Sanhedrin, which is a group of about 70, which is made up of Sadducees and Pharisees. They're all together. And we have Gamaliel who says, "Hold on, guys, before you go out and murder these people, let's think about this a minute." And he gives two incidences... and we won't go into the incidences. There's two cases in which there was a leader who kind of had an off shoot of what was going on. The leader died and the off shoot kind of scattered and disappeared and you don't hear it anymore. He says, Look, if it's a man, it won't happen. But if it's a God you're fighting against God, and you will lose.

Now, that second half of the statement by Gamaliel is definitely true. The first half, we have seen throughout history, people who have led others astray and led people into false religions and so on, and they have died and their religions have continued. So we need to be careful about saying that as a truth all the time. But the second piece of that, "If you are fighting against God, you will lose, because if this is God's movement, - and they know as the people of Israel, how God has saved them throughout the Old Testament - he will provide and he will win in the end. So he says, "People, the best course of action here is to let them go. Because it's up to God. You don't want to be fighting God. So they listen to them.

Then notice what they do. It says in **Acts 5:40**, "**40** His speech persuaded them." His speech was, "Let them go. So they called the apostles in and had them flogged. So they called the Apostles in and then they had them flogged." That's not exactly letting them go. To flog a person is to whip a person in which you would bend them over so that their back is stretched out. You've got cords which are tied with either little broken pieces of stone or iron and you would hit it on the far side so that it goes into the back and then dragged.

In the Old Testament, there was a strict law that you may not flog a person more than 40 lashes. So the Jews would always do 39 just in case they miscounted and they would stop at 39. But who else was flogged? When we look back to the night before Jesus was crucified, Jesus was also flogged and whipped. So now Peter is flogged and wept along with the apostles.

And notice the reaction in **Acts 5:41**. "**41** The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name." They left after being flogged saying, "We are rejoicing because we have been seen as Christ and Christ has been seen in us. Even though we are treated as Christ was treated just before he was killed, we see God moving." Because right after that, it says, "They never stopped teaching and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus, the Messiah."

God continues to work within His church. Today, as we gather within the church, we think about what our shadow says to the people around us. Are we being a reflection of Christ? But we also say as believers, we say, "Thank You, Lord." We say, "Thank you that you have given Your life and that you have revealed Yourself to us, that we may know You and that we may see You as our Savior. And that we may come to You with repentance. And when we come to you in repentance, You promise us that there is full remission of our sins."

Lord's Supper

So we do that as we gather together today to take the Lord's Supper. We gather as people who have come knowing that we are sinners, knowing that we ourselves need a Savior. Let me read a section from **Isaiah 53:1-6**. It says, "

"**1** Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? **2** He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. **3** He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

4 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. **5** But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. **6** We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

So we gather at the Lord's table and we remember as Christ gathered with His disciples on the night before He was crucified. They gathered in the breaking of bread and fellowship. Jesus took the bread and He broke it and Jesus says, "This is my body, broken for you." [Pastor John breaks the bread.] "That you may have life and that you may have life abundantly. This is life giving bread from Jesus who said he is the bread of life."

After supper, he took the cup [Pastor John pours the juice] and he blessed it and he thanked God and said, "This is a covenant of my blood, which has been shed for you. Which allows us today to say, "His blood is upon us and our children. Not out of guilt but out of a washing away of our sins."

So you are invited. All those who are saying to our Lord today, "We repent and we ask for the complete remission of our sins, that we may be with you."

I invite the servers to come on forward and I invite you to take a piece of bread/ I invite you to hold on to it and pause and think about how God has forgiven you. In what areas do I need to come to our Lord and Savior in repentance. And ask for his repentance of all our sins.

[Servers pass out the bread to the congregation.]

The bread which we break is given to us in remembrance of Christ who died for us. Take it. Eat it. Remember and believe that Jesus died for a complete remission of all your sins.

[Congregation eats the bread.]

As you take the juice, we invite you to think about where you need Jesus to wash you clean. What areas in your life do you want to bring before Him to say, "Lord, please wash me clean and make me clean like snow."

[Servers pass out the juice to the congregation.]

Jesus took the cup. Jesus said, "I am the vine and you are the branches." We see Jesus as the living water, the life source of our lives. And when Jesus took the cup, He said, "Do this in remembrance of me. Because My love for you is so great that I am willing to shed My blood for you." And we can say today, "May His blood be on us and our children."

So as we together partake in communion and as we together say, "Lord, thank you for Your gift of grace," take it, drink it. Remember that the blood of Christ has washed you clean. And you now stand clean before the Father as His righteousness. Drink it. Remember and believe it. His blood was shed for complete remission of all your sins.

Benediction

Alistair Begg says this, "In order for us to walk in the truth, we must crucify our pride and be more concerned with what God thinks of us than with what someone else thinks of us." May that be how we live our week this week. May we live consciously about how God thinks of us and how much God loves us. May we also think consciously of how we can represent the love of Christ to those around us, knowing that we do not go alone but that we go with others.

So I invite you to stand. Join me in prayer and receive God's final blessing. I invite you, with this prayer and with God's blessing, to hold out your hands as a gift from God. Dear Lord, we give ourselves to You. Lord, we receive this bread and juice as Your gift to us. Lord, may it nourish us that we may walk each day being reminded of what You think of us and how You love us, and that we may walk in ways in which our shadow may reflect Your glory.

Lord, we know that we cannot do this on our own but we do this only in the name of Jesus. Because all authority has been given to Him, to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy. To the only God our Savior be glorious, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior before all ages. Now and forevermore. Amen.

Transcribed by: *Liza Perry*