

Rejoicing in the Unstoppable Gospel Acts 5:17-42

Main Point:

God's "unstoppable gospel" should fill Christians with confidence and joy as they proclaim Christ to a hostile world.

Introduction: Joy & Confidence in God's Unstoppable Gospel

Good morning! Please open your bibles to Acts 5. If you are new to the Bible, you can find Acts 5 following the gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John).

Today marks one week after what we celebrated last Sunday – the resurrection of Jesus. Easter Sunday is the biggest Sunday for the church, for it reminds us of where our hope lays and what is still to come. Easter is a ray of light that shines into our darkness, announcing to us that the present darkness does not and will not have the final word in our lives and in this world – Jesus does! But just like every other week, we have to face Monday. Monday is the back to reality day. And this is especially true for Pastors. I read a statistic once that many pastors fall into a depression following the week of Easter. Part of it is fatigue, but the other element is just simply the fact that on Easter we get to talk about a coming reality so magnificent, so hopeful, so wonderful, that the crusing reality that Monday brings is in danger of undermining all that was celebrated the previous day. However, my guess is that many of you likely felt the same way – Easter is a spiritual high, and then the week that follows goes low again.

Well, friends, I cannot imagine a better tonic for us than to come back to our study in the book of Acts. This morning – a week after celebrating the reality of the resurrection of Jesus - we get to come back into Luke's world, where we are once again invited to see life, the church, the gospel, and the spiritual realities we exist in from a divine perspective. You see Luke, the author of Acts, is not just recording history for us – telling us what happened, where and to whom. He is giving us history of course, but so much more than that. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Luke is providing for us as readers a lense, a perspective by which we can understand God's divine purposes for the world! What Luke does for us is show us how the resurrection of Jesus leads to His exaltation, where He currently exists at the right hand of God, and through the Spirit, Christ also now dwells among us, in our hearts, and wherever Christians are gathered to proclaim His name. And as His name is proclaimed, the darkness turned into light, and Satan's realm and rule is continuously being pushed back.

So if you have come here today discouraged, pessimistic, fearful about the times and season we are living in, my hope is that Luke's account of the unstoppable gospel will stir you to a hope in the living Lord we serve, and strengthen you to keep pressing on for the cause of the gospel. Let us pray as we begin...

Starter: Perspective Matters

There is a famous optical allusion I learned in school (and I'm sure many of you have seen before) of the picture of the young woman/old woman. This anonymous German postcard is from 1888. It states: *"In every young woman, there is the promise of the woman she will grow into, and in every older woman, there is the memory of the young woman she once was"*.

It is a famous perceptual illusion in which the brain switches between seeing a young girl and an old woman. This fascinating illustration has two answers. Some folks, upon glancing at the drawing, immediately see a young woman. Others instantly know that it's an illustration of an old woman. Both the interpretations are right. You can see the image of a young girl and an old woman too with different angles.

The point of this picture is that perception matters. The lens by which you view the world around you influences how you act, think, and behave. For many Christians, and I am guessing many of you, your view of the current

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situation which we find ourselves in is largely a negative one. The challenges the church faces in the broader culture feel daunting, some may even say insurmountable. Let me name a few:

- Media/Big Tech hostility
- LGBTQ influence
- Progressive Christianity (#exvangelical movement)
- Secular ideologies such as CRT, DEI, all of which fly under the banner of social-justice

The dangers and influences are real; yes, the challenges we face are daunting (humanly speaking), and will continue to be so! One writer put it this way:

“A progressive—and profoundly anti-Christian militancy—is steadily overtaking society taking material form in government and private institutions, in corporations, in academia and media, and in the changing practices of everyday American life. It is empowered by unprecedented technological capabilities to surveil private life. There is virtually nowhere left to hide.” – Rod Dreher, *Live Not By Lies*

We see it happening all over our culture, and within the church there is a growing fear and anxiety about what will the future be. And I hear many Christians, including Christian leaders, speak about these realities as if there is no hope for the future at all – apart from the Lord’s return. But what if there is another way to look at things? What if our current circumstances are something of an optical illusion? What if there is a younger, more hopeful face that we simply haven’t quite allowed ourselves to see just yet? In my opinion, there are two missing elements among modern evangelicals today, elements which we find ringing throughout Acts on almost every single page, and are present in the text we just read: *confidence and joy in the unstoppable gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Throughout the book of Acts, we will find that every institution, government, group, leaders that oppose the gospel end up just like the temple-leadership does: confused and befuddled because despite their best efforts, they can’t get the Apostles and their community to quit talking about Jesus. And wherever Jesus is being talked about, more followers are made.

This morning, we will be do the first of a 2-part message entitled *Rejoicing in the Unstoppable Gospel*. My hope and aim for these next two messages is to give us Luke’s perspective, which is really God’s perspective as the Holy Spirit is the divine inspiration behind all that Luke records for us in the book of Acts, concerning the power and ability of the gospel to not only overcome opposition, but to even thrive in the midst great adversity and persecution. Admittedly, this will be a theme that we’ll return to again and again in different way as we make our way through Acts. But I want to get us started in the process of having our minds and hearts renewed in accordance with Luke’s way of thinking (which, again, is actually God’s way of thinking), and for us to recover not only our confidence in the power of the gospel, but follow the Apostles’ example of actually rejoicing at the prospect of persecution/adversity. Lets open our bibles to Acts 5...

Setting the Context:

For those of you just joining us, we are going through the book of Acts together. I want to do a brief review of where we are:

- Before the Lord Jesus ascends back to the Father, His disciples ask Him about the restoration of the kingdom for Israel.
- Instead, Jesus gives the disciples a task: wait for the Holy Spirit to empower them to be His witnesses from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.
- The Lord Jesus ascends back to the right hand of God
- The Spirit is poured out on the day of Pentecost, enabling the disciples to speak in different languages and glorify God! The pouring out of the Spirit is in accordance of Old Testament prophecy, when God

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would bring His people out of exile and restore them in the land. This happened (geographically), but not yet spiritually.

- Peter preaches the first sermon and calls the people to repentance, with 3,000 being converted. The people then gather to worship, pray, teach, with signs and wonders being performed.
- A crippled man is healed (first miracle!) and it causes a ruckus with the Temple-leadership.
- Meanwhile, the community continues to thrive under the Apostles leadership!

Exposition of Acts 5:17-40

The Apostles arrested, then freed to go back to the Temple to preach the words of “life” - Acts 5:17-21

While this story is astounding in and of itself, what we should take note of is how Luke describes the angel’s commission: “words of *life*”! In previous messages, I have said that with the resurrection of Jesus, we have a “new creation”:

The New Creation which the prophets anticipated (evidenced by a renewed Temple, a Davidic King, and restored creation) is becoming a present reality under the authority of the risen Jesus and those who minister in His name

You see the Lord Jesus has come to bring new “life”, resurrection “life” to people. With His resurrection, His kingdom has been inaugurated – introduced! – and His rulership over the nations begins; a reign which will continue until He appears again to make all things new. But during this present time, Jesus is showing His power by bringing “life” – resurrection life! – to dead souls, people caught in throes of darkness and under Satan’s dominion. Friends, know that this is the will of God for us as His followers, as His church – to not only experience this “life” He gives us in our salvation, but to also be His ambassadors who boldly spread the word of “life” to all people. Now, as we have seen and will see, speaking the “word of life” does invites spiritual opposition. Let’s read on:

The Temple-leadership reacts with more threats - Acts 5:22-26

The apostles boldness, and the spiritual fruit of their mission confounds and confuses those opposed to them. They are not sure what to do, totally confused!

The Apostles respond to the threats with boldness - Acts 5:27-31

According to the scriptural story in the Old Testament – which these leaders knew and affirmed – the Holy Spirit is God’s gift to His people, and as promised by Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and notably, the prophet Joel, would be given to Israel as a sign of their restoration at the end of times. However, Peter says that God’s Holy Spirit has been poured out and is being given to those who follow and obey the Lord Jesus! So in the Jewish mind at this time, this claim is scandalous, and considered blasphemy!

Gamaliel offers wisdom: if it’s of God, it can’t be stopped! - Acts 5:32-40

(Background on Gamaliel). He represents not only a voice of wisdom, but also of prophecy: if this is a work of God, it cannot be stopped!

Take note of this, friends, for in the mouth of wise Gamaliel, who at this time is not a believer, is exactly the message that Luke intends to communicate to us. The gospel of the risen, resurrected Jesus is unstoppable. No human institution, government, or leader will be able to withhold the “word of life” that is now overtaking the world.

The apostles rejoice and continue teaching about the Lord Jesus - Acts 5:40-42

As the opposing pressure increases and the shadow of more severe persecution grows (which is coming in the next couple of chapters), we don’t find the Apostles becoming pessimistic, anxious, or fearful – instead, they grow bolder, more determined, and more hopeful of what God was going to do and – dare I say it! – more joyful. How? Where do the apostles get their excitement, energy, and passion for the Lord Jesus, despite the

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threats of the religious leaders? Simple: from the conviction that the gospel of the resurrected Lord Jesus is unstoppable! Not even the gates of hell can withstand the power of Christ's Spirit-filled church!

So, here is the main point:

Main Point: *God's "unstoppable gospel" should fill Christians with confidence and joy as they proclaim Christ to a hostile world*

Application: Lessons for Today

This is how Luke sees the world; its why he records the book of Acts. And doing so under the inspiration and direction of the Holy Spirit means that Luke is writing not only his own opinions, but giving us God's own perspective on how the exalted Lord Jesus is going about fulfilling the mission that was given to Him through the Spirit.

I said at the outset that there are two missing elements among modern evangelicals today, elements which we find ringing throughout Acts on almost every single page, and are present in the text we just read: *confidence and joy in unstoppable gospel of Jesus Christ*. Let me categorize these points this way:

How the Unstoppable Gospel shaped the Apostles' attitude (and should shape ours!)

- 1) ***Absolute Confidence in the triumph of Christ's cause and kingdom.***
- 2) ***Resilient Joy despite temporary persecution, trials, and difficulties.***

Today, I want to emphasize the first point. Next week, we will come back to vv. 41-42, and focus on how to spiritually thrive amidst difficulties and trials. So lets unpack how to have absolute confidence in triumph of Christ's cause and kingdom...

Absolute Confidence in the triumph of Christ's cause and kingdom.

- 1) **Refuse to accept "respectable atheism" (despair)**
- 2) **Recount the work of God in your life and those around you (hope) Psalm 145:1-7**
 - Write it all down and meditate!
 - Testimony of God's provision in the move (prayer list). Teach your kids to hope!
 - Jesus Revolution

The gospel will not be taken to the ends of the earth by disheartened, discouraged, fearful Christians! But by those who are enamored with the wonders of God, of Christ, and the gospel!