

Acts 5:12-42

Great Endurance in Mission

Ryan Perz – November 17, 2019

Intro: What does serving God look like? There is not one answer, but we can get close in 2 Cor 6. Even though it's not our text, it will help get us a frame of reference in the narrative of Acts, and a picture of what devoted service to God looks like.

We can see this as a spiritual resume for the apostle Paul. He is giving his credentials for serving God.

(2 Cor 6:4-10)—

⁴ but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by *great endurance*, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; ⁷ by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸ through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

- Many of the “attributes” of God’s servants are seen in Acts, especially as the book unfolds and persecution heats up.
- But notice what tops the list: *Great Endurance*.

I think that is a main takeaway from this entire passage in Acts 5.

Things have started to heat up again—another arrest, trial...and now death wishes.... The question is: will the apostles endure? Will the teaching and preaching of Christ survive?

Central idea: God has called his people of mission to the work of great endurance.

- The fact is, we see unstoppable progress in Acts....*all because God is at work*.

But the progress and advance of the gospel is not because times are easy.

The progress and growth of the church is because God gives grace to endure.

****It's no small thing that the final book in scripture has a major theme of endurance.**

(Rev 14:12) ¹² Here is a call for the *endurance* of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

Let's see what we can learn about great endurance—drawing from the words God supplies in 2 Cor 6.

Last week we said that great fear was essential to keep the purity of the church; now we see great endurance is necessary for preservation of witness.

1. Great endurance with acts of kindness in the power of God (12-16)

- This is another one of those summary statements about the state of the church
- But it's also a "prayer report update".
- Jump back to 4:30. What did the church pray for? Boldness to speak and ability to perform miracles.
If there is one thing to learn: take seriously what you pray for, because our Sovereign God does!
- The church demonstrated truly serving God by how they treated others. God's power is really at work.

The apostles saw broken people—and the gospel, as the means for their healing.

This summary does two things:

—It shows us the character of the early church. They were people unified, purely motivated, who lived in a way very sensitive to the Spirit.

—It also demonstrates that the presence and power of God's kingdom is a *real thing*.

Takeaway:

1. The church has a great reputation even among outsiders (v13) —if there is a verse that speaks against "seeker sensitive" ministry, this is probably it. Unbelievers were afraid to come and "check things out", but they *respected* them.
2. Special grace for the afflicted (v16)

These summary statements of the church in Acts are meant to cause us to reflect and ask if our church is living up to the standard. Is my contribution negative or positive? Is my reputation helping the church? Does my life cause others to hold Christ and his church in high esteem?

Do we show special grace to the afflicted? Do afflicted people, either broken in body or Spirit, do they find a “home” here? For most of us, reaching out a hand to an afflicted person really pushes us out of our comfort zone.

When I was a new Christian, God put a coworker on my heart. So, I invited him to church and bible studies. But he was a hard case. A lot of emotional affliction, deep sin and addictions. Several months into it, I went to my pastor for advice. He said, “catching fish is easy, cleaning them is the dirty work.”

In other words, people’s lives are messy.

But the power of God is a real thing—and just as he used the apostle’s hands, God desires to use our hands to reach out to afflicted and broken people with acts of kindness in the power of God.

2. Great endurance for afflictions, hardships, and imprisonments (17-18)

- Here is a “speed-bump” in Acts.
- The apostles continued to disregard the orders not to preach the gospel in the temple.

This is round two of persecution. Jesus said that discipleship is not easy, neither is serving him. We better be prepared for hardship, afflictions, prison, and possibly death.

But Acts does not end in Ch. 5; there is great endurance.

3. Great endurance with truthful speech by the Holy Spirit (19-32)

- Christians like to talk about “open doors” —but they probably don’t imagine this kind!
- There is actually humor in this. The council thinks the apostles are still in prison but they are actually not.

(v24). Look!

Let’s look at their speech.

1. In proclaiming the gospel (20)
2. Also, in “civil disobedience” (29)

Historically Christians have gone here many times. Our greatest loyalty is to God, not any human court. It's the Daniel-type of obedience to God above all.

Civil disobedience: when human laws or threats violate a direct command of God, the only alternative is “we must obey God rather than man.”

- If you notice v29-32, all 3 persons of the Trinity are referenced: God the Father, the exalted Son, and Spirit.
- Yet what frames the Trinitarian reference is human obedience. We must *obey God* and the Holy Spirit given *to those who obey him*.

Confessing the triune God of scripture is nothing less than a commitment to obey. Apostolic preaching is grace and gospel saturated, yet it never minimizes the ordinary godly life of obedience.

Finally, note what Peter does not do in his “civil disobedience”. He does not make “civil disobedience” his main thing. Some Christians have made “fight for religious freedom” the main thing. That’s misguided.

Peter keeps the main thing the main thing: preaching the gospel (v31).

- There are two sides to what Peter says.
- First, he clearly wants to proclaim Jesus as risen and reigning. The picture of Jesus in Acts is *exalted*.
- He also draws out a reference to the way Jesus died, connected it with an OT illusion (v30, cf. Dt 21:23).

(Dt 21:23)—anyone executed publicly this way was considered cursed and exposed to shame.

Jesus’s death means two things:

—What he bears, and how he blesses.

He bears the curse and shame sin deserves.

He blesses with the grace of repentance and forgiveness

Jesus is no longer cursed, he is exalted, and therefore able to offer the blessing of repentance and forgiveness.

You need to know that salvation from Jesus is one of *bearing* and *blessing*. If you are still bearing the shame of your sin, you don't need to. Come to Jesus. Have him lift the burden. He is a burden-lifting Savior. He bears the curse. If you feel the crushing weight of the curse; if you look at your life and it's a total train wreck, come to Jesus and be blessed with repentance and forgiveness.

4. Great endurance through beatings (sufferings) yet always rejoicing (33-42)

Gamaliel's counsel

- Now to secure a death sentence, the Sadducees would need the support of some Pharisees. They need to "reach across the aisle".
- Enter Gamaliel who was a leading rabbi of his day.

The Mishna—held him in a high, honorific state; "When Gamaliel died the glory of the Torah ceased, and purity and separateness died."

And he has some good advice. Essentially, "if this is a man-made thing, it will die out. But if it's of God, then our largest concern needs to be opposing God."

Gamaliel illustrates from history. He points to that insurgent and renegade movements often died out. But what *doesn't die out is something from the hand of God*.

We can understand Gamaliel's wisdom in contemporary terms with one product: fidget spinners. They were the real fad a few years ago. My kids thought they were great. They were so popular that schools banned them because they were too distracting. I even saw an adult in the parking lot with a spinner in one hand and scrolling through their iPhone with the other.

Where are the fidget spinners at now?

That's Gamaliel's reasoning.

Whatever is from God will not be a fad, but will last.

Gamaliel's advice may seem wise at first, but is it? It's the common sense "wait and see" —that's ok in a lot of areas but, it's not ok when dealing with Jesus. And it does not always work. Islam and major cults have millions of followers over many centuries...but they are not from God but are Satanic at the core. Yet they have staying-power over time.

Paul, the apostle, was a student of Gamaliel and demonstrates the "wise" approach—not "wait and see" — but repent before the Lord Jesus.

- Gamaliel's advice "wins over" their intent to kill the apostles.

But a funny thing happens

1. The beating does nothing.
2. Instead of sadness, or discouragement...there is "great joy".

Rejoicing in suffering is the hallmark of Christians.

(Mt 5:11)

¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you... ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."

(Heb 12:2)

² "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.."

(Rom 5:3)

"we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame,"

(1 Pet 4:13)

¹³“But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”

Conclusion:

How does endurance and joy relate?

I confess that when I hear the word endure, I think “tolerate” or “put up with something”, like being stuck in traffic, or waiting for an appointment. But that’s not how the Bible speaks of endurance. In the Bible we see endurance and joy link arms together.

Christians are called to endure, but with joy.

Here we are introduced to a sub-theme in Acts, rather foreign to our thinking, but it’s true:

To suffer for Christ is an honor that causes joy.

The final thing we see is: *evangelistic passion continues*. Evangelism endures.

The truth is: persecution, light or heavy, *will not overthrow the work of God*.

(v42)—The truth of Christ continues to be taught publicly and privately.

*Just remember the context: there were many who demanded silence.

A church leader from Sri Lanka noted. “The early church was clearly focused on evangelism, using every opportunity and paying whatever price was necessary to further that cause. When they went to the courts, their primary concern was not winning a case; it was furthering the cause of the gospel.” (Ajith Fernando, *NIV Application Commentary on Acts*).

This is our call: the mission of great endurance for the sake of Jesus Christ. Using opportunity, paying the price, with our primary concern to further the cause of the gospel. And all with great endurance and joy, *because Christ is worthy of it all*.

