

Scripture Reading:

Acts 5: "12 And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. 13 Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. 14 And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 15 so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. 16 Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed. 17 Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, 18 and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. 19 But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 20 "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life." 21 And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. 22 But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, 23 saying, "Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!" 24 Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. 25 So one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!" 26 Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. 27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, 28 saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" 29 But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. 31 Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him." 33 When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them."

"God Frustrates the Plans of Men"

What we have before us this morning is a quiet miracle that does not get much attention! With the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost coming before and the very detailed escape by Peter coming a little later, this miraculous deliverance of the Apostles is easy to overlook. However, our journey through Luke's orderly account here in Acts brings us to it at just the right time this year as the Church calendar enters the Passion Week. With Palm Sunday today, our Good Friday service and Easter Sunday we remember each year that Jesus came to save His people from their sins and that it came at a great cost.

As we study the passage I read from Acts 5 this week and next, we will note the amazing parallels that we should see... Jesus has become a BIG problem for the religious leaders of that day! Instead of seeing Jesus as the promised Messiah who was coming to Jerusalem at His appointed time to save God's people from their sins, they saw Him as a threat to their power and influence.

Their pride had blinded them so they fulfilled the prophesy of Isaiah as John explains in the 12th chapter of his Gospel beginning at verse 37: This comes right after the his account of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and describes the condition of these leaders until the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70:

“But although [Jesus] had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, 38 that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" 39 Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: 40 "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them." 41 These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him. 42 Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

When these hard-hearted leaders watched Jesus enter Jerusalem they were outraged by the Hosannas lifted up by the people and they insisted that Jesus command them to stop... Jesus refused saying that even if these people were quiet the stones themselves would cry out because it WAS His appointed time to come to Jerusalem & be presented as the great sacrifice for the sins of His people. Jerusalem is filled with Hosannas which they want to stop and Jesus says even the stones would cry out.

Now the Apostles have filled Jerusalem with the Good News that Jesus is the Messiah who has risen from the dead and the same religious leaders want it to STOP. They have commanded them to stop, now they have arrested them to keep them from preaching and these men simply say they MUST obey God rather than man! These religious leaders had a plan to stop this advance of the Kingdom:

Arrest the ring leaders and put a stop to their preaching...

- **But God, as He often does, frustrates the plans of these men so that the Kingdom of His beloved Son can continue its advance until it fills all the earth.**

Let us take a closer look at the text for this morning and see the lessons the Spirit would teach us...

Luke has just given his third account of the life in the new Church there at Jerusalem, which has drawn the attention of the religious leaders: “17 Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), & they were filled with indignation,”

- **So filled with indignation that they, “laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.”**

As we observed so often in the 20th Century man’s solution to problems usually involves the use of force. Men in Russia, Japan, Germany, Southeast Asia and many nations in Africa and South America took seriously the words of the French philosopher Rousseau when he declared that once freed from God men would be truly free...

- **And if they did not want to be free, they would be forced to be free.**

Just as we will see God frustrate the plans of men to the use force to stop the advance of the kingdom in our text this morning...

- **We know that all the attempts by Stalin, Hitler, Mao and even the brutal use of force by Pol Pot to eliminate God and the Bible along with all they stood for were utter failures as well.**

We continue to pray for Russia and many Asian nations where they continue to dwell in much darkness, but we know that one day the light of the Gospel will shine forth as it is in China where by most accounts we have the fastest growing Christian communities in the world today.

Now, I am sure it ruined their day, when the Apostles were arrested and thrown into a common prison... It will grow worse as we move on in the Book of Acts, but time and time again these Saints will see that God is with them, as He continues to be with us today!

These Apostles might even have had some time in that prison to share a few stories about the responses they had seen to the Gospel that very day. They could well have been saddened about the fact that they did not expect to be back in the Temple any time soon, since the leaders had put them in prison to prevent just that!

- But those were the plans of wicked men and they were not going to stop the advance of the Kingdom.

We are not given a lot of details, the way we will be with Peter's escape sometime later, but God certainly has different plans for His Apostles:

19 "But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 20 "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."

- The Apostles are set free as only God could do!

They were removed without the knowledge of any of the guards... Whether they were put to sleep, blinded or the Apostles were teleported back to their home we are not told, but it is a great miracle and it will be yet another witness to those who refused to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead!

- We should also note that the Apostles were not given their 'freedom' in the modern sense since that we use that word...
- The Apostles were miraculously delivered from prison and given the opportunity to serve the God who had delivered them!
- What a marvelous picture of our salvation!
- God delivers us from the prison where sin had taken us and then He gives us the opportunity to serve others!
- Jesus said, if you love me keep my commandments and the Apostles show their love for the Savior:

21 "And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught."

- Once again we see a contrast with the purpose of miracles here in the early church and how we view them today...
- Is our desire that God would miraculously put us in a place where we can serve Him?

Do we rather look for miracles that give us things like health or wealth?

We need to see this as a great example for our sanctification:

We obey the simple commands that God has given us to forsake our sins, share the Good News and care for one another. When God's enemies: The world; the devil; and our own flesh, come against us we pray that God would deliver us. God does deliver us so that we might serve Him more, and that includes much more than giving a testimony!

We all long for the day that we hear those comforting words from the Savior, well done good and faithful servant...

- But we must remember we are servants & we must be faithful!

This is something that the religious leaders of that day had long since forgotten and so we see next that: “the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.”

We should note that they are following all the ‘rules.’ The Apostles had been arrested and now the council was to be gathered so there could be a proper trial. It should serve as a warning to us that we can have our meetings called at the right time, follow the proper order, even use Robert’s Rules and still be working against the Kingdom.

- **It is these types of wicked plans of men, be they religious or secular that God always frustrates as we see in the text:**

22 “But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, 23 saying, "Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!"

We should notice that they had the time to call the council together, make sure everyone was present, send the guards down to the prison and wait for them to return and yet in all this time they did not know what was going on in the Temple, the Temple they were responsible for!

God does have a sense of humor even as He advances the Kingdom!

24 “Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be.”

Now they are not sure what to do or think:

- **Do they have a spy in their midst?**
- **Do the Apostles have someone in the prison on the payroll**
- **Perhaps they have escaped and fled, so their problem is solved!**

As they “wondered” they are informed about what God is really doing...

25 “So one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!"

Once again the Apostles are doing what they were supposed to be doing, what they were commanded to do again that very night, despite any fears they might have had regarding the religious leaders...

- **The same leaders who had crucified the Lord of Glory just a few weeks before!**

Verse 26 is as far as we will go in the account this morning where we read:

“Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned.”

- **The religious leaders want the Apostles arrested and brought back and the captain carries out the order, but he does so wisely...**
- **He does not go up and slap on the hand cuffs with a show of force and haul them away!**
- **This captain has properly read the mood of the crowd and knows that his men could well be stoned if they did not treat the Apostles with respect as they are arrested and returned to the council.**

Here we have a final lesson from those Apostles: Obviously they went willingly with this captain... They did not debate with him or try to stir up the crowds that might have supported them in resisting arrest. They are preaching at the Temple, as they were commanded to do, and this captain has the authority to arrest those the council wants arrested. And so, even though as we shall study next week the Apostles must declare to the council ‘whom shall we obey, God or man?’ they are willing to submit to their authority up to that point and go willingly

- I hope you see a pattern of willing obedience here in the lives of the early Saints!

I trust we have plenty to ponder here in this often neglected passage and I want to close by tackling a question that might be raised... I said earlier that God always frustrates the wicked plans of men and while we may agree intellectually and theologically, there are often times in life where we wonder how it works out practically.

- It would seem that there are many wicked plans being advanced in Washington with nothing to stop them
- We can say much the same about Sacramento and many of our local governments.
- We see individuals like Bill Gates amassing a huge fortune that enables him to support groups like Planned Parenthood, and yet Windows continues to sell.

We see celebrity athletes like Kobe Bryant and Tiger Woods commit heinous sexual crimes and yet their careers continue to advance and they continue to make millions more!

- As we ponder all of this we might begin to think that maybe there are some wicked plans that God does not frustrate...

Or is it just a matter of seeing the big picture as we learned last week?

The Psalmist Asaph struggled with this issue and he wrote out his thoughts in Psalm 73 which continues to teach and comfort God’s people today... I will commend it to your study this week, but Asaph begins with the truth that, “Truly God is good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart.”

- Asaph knows this intellectually, but some of the cases like I described above that would have occurred in his day had troubled him, very seriously!

2 “But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped.”

- What caused Asaph to almost stumble?
- The pride and wealth of the wicked...

3 “For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 For there are no pangs in their death, But their strength is firm. 5 They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like other men. 6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace; Violence covers them like a garment. 7 Their eyes bulge with abundance; They have more than heart could wish.”

- You can see how Asaph’s focus on their actions and even his envy of what they had caused him to almost stumble, and yet he continues...

8 “They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; They speak loftily. 9 They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth. 10 Therefore his people return here, and waters of a full cup are drained by them.”

- They are the arrogant humanists of his day which we considered last week: Who declare that man does not need God to save them, they will save themselves...

- **The Humanist Manifesto brought nothing new:
This prideful thinking has been around for a very long time!**

11 “And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?"

- **Asaph sees how arrogant and prideful they are, but he CANNOT understand why the lighting bolts have not already struck them...**

12 “Behold, these are the ungodly, Who are always at ease; They increase in riches. 13 Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, And washed my hands in innocence. 14 For all day long I have been plagued, And chastened every morning.

15 If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children. 16 When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me—

- **Asaph has come to the end of himself, much as Solomon does in Ecclesiastes or Job in his torment**
- **We cannot understand humanism or confront humanism by being humanists ourselves!**

“When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me— 17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end.”

- **ONLY if we look at things from God’s perspective can we really understand the ‘facts’...**

This is why we are told NOT to forsake the gathering of the Saints together for worship, where we enter the Sanctuary... It is here where learn to see things from God’s perspective!

- **If we are troubled by any or all of the examples I shared a moment ago...**
- **If we have other people or areas of our lives where we cry out as Asaph has done...**
- **Then we should meditate on what Asaph learned in the sanctuary:**

18 “Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. 19 Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. 20 As a dream when one awakes, So, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image.”

- **Truly God does frustrate all the wicked plans of men**
- **Asaph continues to ponder how confused he had become and then declares:**

23 “Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. 24 You will guide me with Your counsel, And afterward receive me to glory. 25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. 26 My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. 27 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry.

28 But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, That I may declare all Your works.”

- **These are the lessons that we are to learn from the Psalmists and from these Saints in the early church!**
- **Lessons that we need to serve the King of Kings and Lord of Lords as the earth is filled with His Kingdom!**
- **We can be assured that no plans of wicked men will stand in the way of this advance!**