

# Sunday 10th March 2024 - Sunday Service

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Date: 10 March 2024

Preacher: John Ross

[ 0 : 00 ] I think you'll find it really helpful this morning if you have the Bible open in front of you, either on page 1097 of the church Bibles or on your phones.

! of two people dropping dead because they deceived. They deceived God and they deceived the church, Ananias and Sapphira.

And if you read the first part of chapter 5, you need to read it with shock and horror. But then you need to ask this question, I think. How would you evaluate success in a new church?

Would success be when the church gets more and more people added? It grows by numbers.

Would that be success? What about if people left? Would that be loss? Failure? Or could you call that pruning?

What is success in the local church? What does it look like? How do we know that God is with us? Is it when we're growing? Or is it when we're shrinking? Well, let's see if Acts 5 can help us.

[ 1 : 31 ] In verses 12 to 15, 12 to 16, I want you to notice how the gospel is making extraordinary progress.

That's the temple in Jerusalem. Look at 12 to 16. The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people, and all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's colonnade.

Solomon's colonnade is in the corner of the temple, and is probably not the large fortress on the right-hand side, but just one of the corner sections of the temple where there are lots and lots of pillars.

No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

That's a key verse. And Luke pops these little verses throughout Acts to show the churches making progress. As a result, people brought those who were ill 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.

[ 2 : 37 ] Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing those who were ill and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed. It's fabulous progress, isn't it?

And as I say, Luke puts down these markers every now and again in the Gospel, in the account that he's writing here particularly, to show that the Gospel is making headway. There was one marker at the end of chapter 2 after the day of Pentecost.

There was one at the end of chapter 4, and here again we've got a section. The followers meet around the temple courts. Healings take place. Many, many people become believers.

There's more conversions to Christ, and there's more growth. Verse 14 is key, isn't it? More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

And all looks good, 12 to 16. But then there's a different movement that takes place. Now look down from 17 onwards, which I'm calling formal opposition.

[ 3 : 40 ] Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees. There were two major parties in Judaism, the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

And the Sadducees were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles, put them in the public jail. But during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.

Go stand in the temple courts, he said, and tell the people all about this new life. At daybreak, they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

So there's a little bit of opposition, but then they carry on teaching. Now look again. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin.

This is the full assembly of the elders of Israel. And they sent to the jail for the apostles. But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported it.

[ 4 : 45 ] We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors. But when we opened them, we found no one inside. Ha, ha, ha. Well, on hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

Then someone said, someone came and said, Look, the men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people, just as the angel had told them, you see. 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. The apostles were brought in, made to appear before the Sanhedrin, to be questioned by the high priest.

We gave you strict orders not to teach in his name, they said. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.

Now, the opposition this time isn't just a few people, it is the high priest. It is the Sanhedrin. This is formal opposition. So the gospel is making good growth, Luke tells us, 12 to 16.

[ 5 : 53 ] And then there is this opposition that takes place. The Jewish leadership, the high priest, the Sanhedrin, they're not at all happy. The apostles have been imprisoned, but God has brought them out miraculously.

And given them instructions, 19 to 21. During the night, the Lord brought them out. Go stand in the temple courts, he said.

Tell all the people about this new life. And at daybreak, they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and they began to teach the people. They just didn't give up. They teach once again.

Now, this whole Sanhedrin is on the attack. But this time, I think there's a bit of humour and comedy, as I believe God tricks them. And the leaders are made to look like fools.

And I think we're meant to smile. Well, at this passage, at least, we're meant to smile anyway in life. But at this passage, we're meant to smile. They go to the jail to find them, and they're not there.

[ 6 : 50 ] Where are they? They're teaching again. They're doing exactly what we told them not to do. But then you get phrases like this. Look at 27. They were made to appear before the Sanhedrin.

The apostles are quizzed. You have filled Jerusalem, 28. You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.

Isn't that a fantastic charge? You have filled this town, this city, with your teaching. Wouldn't you want to be accused of that?

You know what your trouble is? Too many people in Farnham believe in Jesus because of you. It's that kind of thing, isn't it? The Jewish leaders, of course, have completely misunderstood the death of Jesus.

Do you see that at the end of 28? You're determined to make us guilty of this man's blood. Well, that's right, isn't it? They should feel guilty about his blood. But they don't see the implications of his death.

[ 7 : 53 ] That's what they fail to see. Well, now, is opposition like this a sign of gospel success? I think it might well be, mightn't it?

It might well be. There's been gospel progress. There's been this formal opposition. They're still going at it, aren't they? But then notice something else that occurs at 29 to 32.

Look at this, this third thing. Peter and the other apostles now reply in the Sanhedrin. And this is what Peter says.

We must obey God rather than human beings. The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead, whom you killed by hanging on a cross.

God exalted him to his own right hand as prince and saviour that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.

[ 8 : 56 ] Here's another gospel explanation. This is the third time that Luke has mentioned Peter explaining the good news of Jesus. It's a third record.

We had a long one in chapter 2, we call the day of Pentecost. And this one is the shortest. Very short, isn't it? I don't know if Peter was actually as brief as this.

This is what Luke records. But it's a reminder of a gospel that he presented to the Sanhedrin. Made to appear before the Sanhedrin, this is what he says to them as he explains the gospel.

He doesn't talk about himself. He doesn't defend himself. He just says we are witnesses to this. We saw it. Remember, witnesses bear testimony.

They bear testimony to Jesus. And witnesses in Jewish culture had to be more than one. Two or more witnesses were needed. We. We are witnesses of this, he says. This means this would stand up in court.

[ 9 : 58 ] This could be legal testimony that I'm presenting to you. It's true, in other words, is what he's saying. There's more than one witness. Now, do you see how the pattern is emerging?

There is an incident that occurs. There's an explanation that is given. Peter and the apostles give their explanation. It always focuses on Jesus. Every time there is something that happens, so there is an explanation given.

And the explanation given that centres on Jesus says this, really. The authentic Messiah, the one you're looking for, is the suffering Messiah.

The authentic Messiah, the true Messiah, is the suffering Messiah. That's not what they've been looking for. They've been looking for a kingly Messiah. They've been looking for a political Messiah. They've been looking for a Messiah who will rule on horseback and lead the troops against Rome. No, the authentic Messiah is a suffering Messiah. They've misunderstood.

[ 11 : 01 ] And very cleverly, Peter goes straight from the God of our ancestors. Did you notice that in 30? The God of our ancestors. Our ancestors. Jewish ancestors.

Raised Jesus from the dead. He moves from the ancestors, as he's done before, straight to Jesus. With the familiar phrase, God raised him, you killed him.

That's the same gospel that he taught earlier. Now, Jesus was not merely killed. Our God raised him. And he wasn't just raised from the dead.

He was exalted to heaven. You killed him. God raised him from the dead. That's the familiar contrast all the time. You killed him.

God raised him. You are guilty. God has set him free. And Peter and his team are quite, quite clear that God must come first.

[ 11 : 55 ] Verse 29. We must obey God rather than human beings. This is the God of our ancestors. Now, in theory, I think the Jewish leaders would have agreed with that first statement.

We must obey God rather than human beings. They would have agreed that the God of our ancestors has to be believed in. He has to be upheld. He has to be obeyed.

Yes. Yes. But only in theory. Did they practice it? Did they make the connection between that God of their ancestors and Jesus?

Did they see the flow of biblical history that took them to Jesus? Did they see that? Or were their Jewish rules tighter and tighter and tighter?

Greater than even the law of Moses. Especially what you could do on the Sabbath. Which Jesus has just smashed to pieces. Could they connect the God of our ancestors, our Jewish forefathers, with Jesus?

[ 13 : 00 ] That's why genealogies are so important. You might not think so. But for Jewish people, to read a genealogy that connects the God of the past, acting in the past through people, to Jesus is really, really important.

God has exalted this man, Jesus. God has done that. The God of your ancestors has done that. And if he's exalted Jesus, shouldn't you do that? That's the implication, isn't it?

And shouldn't we? That's the implication. And it's only from his seat in glory that the Lord Jesus can grant repentance and forgiveness. Did you notice that towards the end?

God exalted him, 31, to his own right hand, that's the significant hand of authority, as prince and saviour, that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins.

Yes, and we are witnesses of this. God has exalted him so that he might bring repentance and forgiveness, because if he hadn't ascended, the Holy Spirit wouldn't have been given.

[ 14 : 03 ] And that's the Holy Spirit who convicts people of their sin. Now, please notice that the apostles say nothing politically. They do not attack Rome.

They do not attack the authorities. They stick to Jesus. They go straight from the God of our ancestors to Jesus. Straight from you killed him, but God raised him.

And if they stuck to Jesus like that, we should as well, shouldn't we? And they show the great contrast between what we humans do, kill Jesus, attack and kill him, and what God does in raising Jesus to life and exalting him.

But alongside the human witnesses, the we, we are witnesses of this, alongside the human witnesses, there is another witness in 32.

We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him. So is the Holy Spirit.

[15:11] Yes, two witnesses are essential. Here's a third witness, another witness. This emphasizes the truthfulness of what they've been saying. God raised Jesus.

He exalted him to his right hand, and he sent his Holy Spirit. And look who he's given his Holy Spirit to. It's not necessarily you. It's those who obey.

Did you see that twice? We must obey God. 29. 32. God has given to those who obey him his Spirit. Not just the religious. Not just the Jewish leaders. With their great history. But the obedient ones. Those who do what he requires.

Who carry out his will. Don't you think it's just brilliant here? That they know how to talk about Jesus.

[16:08] They know how to make the connections. They don't defend themselves. They don't draw attention to themselves. But they point to Jesus. I'd like to be able to do that better.

Wouldn't you? We want to be able to point people to the Lord Jesus. He's our hero, isn't he? We want to avoid being caught up in the politics of the day.

The religious confusion of our culture. We want to cut to the chase and get to Jesus. We want to lift him up. But we also want to make it clear. That it's our responsibility.

Human responsibility. All humans' responsibility. For putting him on the cross. That rests with us. Because we don't like rivals. Because we want to be our own God.

We must do away with Jesus. That's opposition thinking. I think Peter is brilliant here. Absolutely brilliant. That he can get us to a gospel explanation so easily.

[17:05] So simply. So clearly. Right in front of the Sanhedrin. Well we're not done yet. Luke says you need to hear a bit more. Look at this.

From 32 onwards. You would think they were in trouble in that Sanhedrin. After they had said that. And they are. Look at 33. When they heard this.

They were furious. Furious. And they wanted to put them to death. Yes. They'd put Jesus to death. And they wanted to put the apostles to death. But. Here's the but.

A Pharisee. Named Gamaliel. A teacher of the law. Who was honoured by all the people. Stood up in the Sanhedrin.

He's one of them. And he ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed the Sanhedrin. Men of Israel.

[17:59] Consider carefully. What you intend to do to these men. And he quotes two people. The first one is Thudus.

I think it's pronounced. Or Thaddeus. Some time ago. Thudus appeared. Claiming to be somebody. And about 400 men rallied to him. He was killed.

And all his followers were dispersed. And it came to nothing. Hmm. After him. Judas the Galilean appeared. In the days of the census.

And he led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed. And all his followers were scattered. So they rose up. Nothing happened.

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.

[18:59] It will fail. But. If it is from God. You will not only be able to stop these men. You will only find yourselves fighting against God.

It's a brilliant speech isn't it. No wonder 40 says 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 they let them go. Now the ending here is really important. The apostles left the Sanhedrin. Not rubbing their sore backsides.

But rejoicing. Because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace. For the name. The name of Jesus. Day after day in the temple courts. And from house to house.

They never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news of Jesus. The good news that Jesus is the Messiah. Fabulous isn't it? It's like poking a tongue out of the Sanhedrin isn't it?

[20:00] Fabulous. Absolutely fabulous. How did it turn around? How could they carry on doing their work? Because of this man Gamaliel. Because he persuaded the people.

That's the twist in this particular story here in Acts 5. See the people didn't bow down in repentance and faith. They cried out for the blood. Didn't they?

Of the apostles. Isn't that what 33 says? When they heard this they were furious. And wanted them put to death. The apostles. But up pops a supporting Pharisee.

One respected by the people. In God's goodness. He had placed Gamaliel. In that gathering. Of the Sanhedrin. Oh for good people.

To stand up and be counted. To come in at just the right moment. How good of God is that? If Peter can't say anything.

[ 21 : 04 ] Then God has his own man. And one of the people who will say something. For the gospel. And Gamaliel addresses the leaders with a little bit of history. By the way Gamaliel was the grandson.

And follower of the great rabbi Hillel. And Saul of Tarsus was one of his pupils. He was regarded highly.

He was known for his scholarship. Wisdom and moderation. Says John Stott. His scholarship. Wisdom and moderation. Indeed Luke says here.

He was honoured by all the people. He seems to have taken charge. He arranges for the apostles to go outside of the room. And thus allows the council to confer in private. And he counseled caution.

Caution. Giving these two examples of Thudis and Judas. Under Thudis it came to nothing. The revolt under Judas melted away. So he advised that the apostles be left alone.

[ 22 : 06 ] And let's see if this is true or not. Because if it's from God. We won't be able to stop it. And that did the trick. Don't you know that phrase?

At 40. His speech persuaded them. Now the Gamaliel principle as it were. May not always be true. Yes in the long term.

Anything from God will succeed. That is true. And that which is human or just from Satan will not succeed. True. But we can't always guarantee that in the short term.

Sometimes our plan seems to be in the will of God. And then something goes wrong and it fails. Now remember what we have here is historical narrative.

This isn't always the way it happens. This is just what happened then. But I think you can draw a principle. We can thank God that he has his defenders in place.

[ 23 : 10 ] And often when we least expect it. Let me try and use this example. For years and years. 50, 60 years. Longer probably.

We have relied on the fact. That England was a Christian country. The Queen, King. Was head of the church.

We relied on that. They still are. On paper. The head of the church. But no longer are we a Christian country. Yet there are people around us.

People of good will. Who will stand up for Christian values. There's a fabulous historian. Whose podcast is worth listening to.

Called Tom Holland. Who wrote a book. Dominion. And shows just the fact that we can reason together. The fact that we can be rational people. The fact that we can be kind to one another.

[ 24 : 08 ] The fact that we still value love. All those things come because of our Christian heritage. Our Judeo-Christian heritage. They don't come out of atheism. They don't come out of Islam. They don't come out of Judaism. They come out.

Well partly Judaism. They don't come out of Buddhism do they? They come out of Christian values. Forgiving your neighbour. Is a Christian virtue.

I read the Times. You can shoot me for that if you want to. I'm prepared to take it. But Melanie Phillips is worth a read. She's a little bit extreme at times. She's Jewish.

But she sees it so clearly. That we've lost our Judeo-Christian heritage. And I've just read a book that I found in the.

What do you call a room that we pray in here? Mike's old office. You see if you don't pray with your eyes closed. You see the books on the shelves. And I saw this one. The War on the West by Douglas Murray.

[ 25 : 06 ] Have you read any of Douglas Murray? He is a gay man. And he is not a practising believer. But he has a perception of culture.

That is just just superb. And this particular book. Mainly American based. But this particular book says. If you have a skewed view of the world.

He looks at the world in America. Through they say he says through racist eyes. Everything is up for grabs. We have to have. Everybody equal.

Black lives matter. Critical race theory is important. If you look through that lens. Everything about the world is skewed. You need to look through a better lens.

What's a better lens? Our Judeo-Christian heritage. He's not a practising believer. But he sees it. He sees it clearly. Young men are flocking to hear Jordan Peterson.

[ 26 : 03 ] Not a practising believer. But he sees it so clearly. Here in the West. We've bought into all sorts of other values. The Judeo-Christian values.

Give us the position that we're in. Allow us to argue and reason. I wish they'd get us on to Jesus a bit stronger. But I do thank God. For those defenders of our faith.

The Tom Hollands. The Melanie Phillippses. The Douglas Murrays. Thank God for them. God does have his people that he brings in to help us. When it looks as though we're all at sea.

I think the last point you have to see here. Is glorious suffering. In those last two verses. The apostles left the Sanhedrin. Rejoicing. Because they had been counted worthy of suffering.

Disgrace for the name. Day after day in the temple courts. From house to house. They never stopped teaching. And proclaiming. The good news.

[ 27 : 02 ] That Jesus. Is the Messiah. Isn't that fabulous? They were counted worthy. Of suffering. Disgrace for the name. They were proud of it.

It's a brilliant way to understand suffering. Isn't it? To be counted worthy to suffer. Doesn't the persecuted church have something to teach us? If you came the other week.

Or last Sunday. And saw what was going on in Nepal. And the church growth. Under persecution. Don't you jump for joy. And put your money into it? They continued here.

In gospel ministry. Now what I particularly want you to see this morning. Is what I'm going to call the swing of the chapter. There's movement here. This is a story.

There's movement going on. We had good gospel headway in the first few verses. Then we had opposition. Then the gospel was explained. With a bit of support from Gamaliel.

[ 27 : 58 ] And then there was suffering. And then we carry on with the gospel. You see the movement that's going on all the time in the chapter. Between gospel growth that looks good. And suffering and opposition that doesn't look good. And God has his men right there where he wants them.

So here are my takeaways for this morning. You won't remember those five headaches. Think of these things. Gospel ministry can be tough. And we need allies.

That's I think what we see from the chapter isn't it? Secondly. We should count suffering as honourable. Yes we should. And thirdly. The big punch I think.

The main punch of the chapter. Never give up gospeling people. Day after day. Did you see that? At 42. Day after day. In public and in private.

They never stop teaching and proclaiming the good news. That Jesus is the Messiah. Don't you just admire them? This is really courageous Christianity isn't it? It makes our trouble seem minor.

[ 29 : 01 ] Yes gospel progress is seen in gospel growth. True. True. But isn't it also seen. When the situation is tough. When to suffer for Christ.

Is actually to be counted worthy. My main takeaway this morning. I must keep on gospeling. Whatever the outcome. Yes I should expect God to work.

Yes I should expect the ministry to grow. But even if there's opposition. I don't give up. God is still at work. So be courageous. Be intentional. And keep going.

Yes gospel ministry can be tough. We need our allies. We should count suffering as honourable. But never give up. Gospeling people. Let's pray together.

Dear Father God. Dear Father God. We thank you for the clarity. Of the good news. That Peter had under his belt.

[ 30 : 01 ] Thank you for his courage. To proclaim the authentic Messiah. When required. We appreciate your man. Gamaliel. Being able to assist the gospel ministry.

By restraining the Sanhedrin. Thank you for men and women. Of goodwill. But please make us wise and sensible. And especially courageous.

In making Jesus Christ known. Often. More often than not. Against the odds. We pray. In Jesus name. Amen.