

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity

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- [0 : 0 0] If you want to gain your life, you will lose it. But if you lose your life for my sake and the Gospels, you will gain it. So the words of Christ.
- The growth of the church is a paradox. For it grows as attempts are made to crush it throughout all of history, throughout Acts as well, we'll see this morning.
- But what is more paradoxical is the message of the Gospel. For it is a message that beckons us to be humble, so that we can be elevated, to lose our lives so that we can gain them.
- At its center is a Savior who saved the world by dying, and by doing so gives life. By rising and disappearing into the heavens, we are promised eternity with God.
- It is a bit of a paradoxical message. For those who have accepted the Gospel, it is the life and life to the full. But for those who don't, the Gospel seems misguided and foolish, and even be a source of condemnation upon them.
- [1 : 1 6] So consider these words from the Apostle Paul, from his first letter to the church in Corinth. 1 Corinthians 1, 18 and following.
- It says this, For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.
- Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Daniel parenthesis here. Where are the influencers of this world? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?
- For since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs, and Greeks seek wisdom.
- But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews, and folly to Gentiles. But to those who are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.
- [2 : 2 4] For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. The apostles stand before the Sanhedrin in Acts chapter 5, in our section that we'll be going through this morning, for the second time in as many chapters.
- We're not sure how much time has elapsed between these two confrontations, but the narrative suggests that not much time has elapsed.
- It seems like they are tempting fate in a way as they continue to preach Christ. They've been warned to not do it, to cease and desist or else.
- And yet, we will see that they are obeying God rather than man. That's the second time we'll see this in Acts. That they have prayed for boldness and strength to continue to bear witness to the cross, despite the growing and mounting opposition that they are facing.

They will continue to disobey the authorities, not because they are rebels, but because they serve a higher authority, Christ Jesus. So, they continue to proclaim the gospel message, pointing to the Messiah, that Jesus alone can save, and in doing so, they are confounding and angering the religious, the wise, the scribes, the influencers of their day.

[3 : 52] And these people ought to be the ones who are pointing people to God. They should be the ones who, being saturated in the scriptures, should see that Jesus truly is the Christ, that the scriptures testify to him.

But, they are about other things. They are not about proclaiming life, but instead are dealing in death.

Quite literally, as they contemplate killing the apostles in our section today. So, we'll see throughout the text that the paradox of the gospel is that as we try to gain our life, we will lose it.

But, if we lose our life for Christ's sake, we will gain it. And we'll see this in three paradoxical ways from our text. The gospel is either folly or life.

The gospel is either condemnation or reconciliation. And finally, the gospel brings honor through dishonor. Remarkable.

[4 : 57] So, let's jump right into it. If you have a Bible or one of these scripture journals, turn to verse 17. If you want to get up at any time to grab one, don't worry, you will not interrupt me.

So, by all means, do it. So, folly or life. Look with me. Verses 17 and 18. But the high priest rose up and all who were with him, that is the party of the Sadducees, and filled with jealousy, they arrested the apostles and put them in public prison.

The Sadducees now have been witness to both the miraculous works of the apostles as well as the growth of the church. Something remarkable had happened that was based not on a new religion but the fulfillment of their own.

They have, if you remember, this aversion to holding up the doctrine of the resurrection, they do not believe in it, and yet, there are a growing group of people that have testified to the resurrection of the Christ in a real, literal way, and yet, they hold fast to their own beliefs.

They have many opportunities to get on board with what the Lord is doing, however, they are filled with jealousy. That word that is used is found only twice in Acts, and in both cases, it describes the zeal and rage that seeks to maintain the religious status quo, and it's only used by the Jewish leaders that oppose Christ's church.

[6 : 42] The Sadducees, really the whole Sanhedrin, they are jealous of the power and success of the apostles. Why? Because it threatens their ever-fleeting power that they possess, and at the same time, they are envious of the growing influence and power of the church.

They are losing grip on the things that they hold dear. They're jealous. They're envious. Even when the apostles are mysteriously released from prison, they cannot bring themselves to see what is truly happening.

Instead, they are even more enraged. Look with me now. We'll jump into verse 21. And continue on.

Now when the high priest came and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel. This is the 70-person group that's called the Sanhedrin that would really be the spiritual and civic leaders of the people of Israel.

They called together the whole council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported.

[8 : 07] We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside. Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priest heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to.

And someone came and told them, Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people. Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

Jealousy and envy have the effect of robbing people of being thankful for the blessings that they have and making it impossible to be happy for the blessings that other people have.

Jealousy and envy rob people of joy and of life and of any kind of godliness that they might have. Envy and jelly are insatiable.

They have insatiable appetites for more, sorry, they have insatiable appetites for more and an incurable sorrow for the success of others.

[9 : 18] In a very real way, jealousy is a mutation of good ambition. Something that, it morphs ambition into something that is ugly and deceitful and not something that helps us to achieve good and godly things in the service of others, but rather it morphs into malice.

it morphs itself into deceit, hatred, and it's ugly jealousy and envy. It does not and it cannot lead to wholeness and happiness.

Jealousy and envy can only lead to death. A relational death. A death of one's joy. Ultimately, with the Sanhedrin today, it might have very well led to literal death.

If you try to gain your life, you will lose it. But if you lose your life for Christ's sake, you will gain it. Let's look at the apostles starting in verse 19 and then we'll continue on.

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

[10 : 46] And when they heard this, that is the apostles, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. The apostles, friends, have once again risked their lives to proclaim the gospel of Christ, to obey him, even though the authorities are pushing for the very opposite.

They obey the messenger of the Lord, this angel, proclaiming, Go, speak the words of this life, meaning, Go, continue to proclaim the gospel of Christ, that salvation is through no one else but Jesus.

So from a worldly point of view, this seems like folly. Like the apostles are throwing their lives away. They risk throwing their influence and budding stardom away.

Why not be a bit more nuanced in front of the Sanhedrin? Why not play a little word game or lean into the gray area to somehow avoid the persecution?

And then when you're back, you can start proclaiming, you know, maybe a bit in secret or tell people, hey listen, this is the gospel message, embrace it, but let's be quiet when the authorities walk around.

[12 : 01] Why can't they be a bit more in a sense winsome using nuance? But they don't. They're obedient. They're obedient to the call of God to continue to proclaim.

So on one hand, it looks like they're potentially playing with fire. They've been warned. Again, cease and desist or else. And yet, if we consider who are the true conduits of wholeness, healing and life, it certainly is not the Sanhedrin and it would not be the apostles if they were to bend and to give in to fear.

Their desire is for others to have eternal blessings, to honor Christ and Christ alone, for the lost to be found, for orphans to find an eternal home, for guilt to be remitted, for the words of this life to take root, grow and flourish.

This is what they are about. They are about life. And yet, they're trying in a sense in obeying God to lose their life.

And yet, what is the result? They are gaining their life and proclaiming life everywhere they go. the apostles are participating in the very mission of Christ, suffering like Christ, obeying their Heavenly Father like Christ, laying down their lives like Christ, for Christ.

[13 : 29] Even still, how is this possible? I mean, it is easy to say I will follow you even to your death like St. Peter. And then a servant girl in the courtyard of the high priest says, hey, you have an accent kind of like Jesus.

You were with him, weren't you? And then, like Peter, we cowered. So, what animates the apostles here to have this kind of boldness, this courage that will cling to the words of life, the gospel, even though in doing so they risk dying?

What animates the disciples to lose their lives for the sake of the gospel? The apostles have seen and experienced the message of life in their own hearts.

Their lives are transformed. They've been given the Holy Spirit and now have boldness to obey. In a very real way, they have fed on the gospel, fed on Christ.

They have seen him as infinitely greater than anything that they could hope to achieve in this life that would somehow give them meaning for the life to come.

[14 : 43] They have embraced Christ by his Spirit. Salvation has come to these men. It's not that they don't have times where they falter. If you remember a couple weeks ago after the first confrontation with the Sanhedrin, they gather together and they pray for boldness because it would imply that they're afraid.

It's difficult, but this is what they do. They're feeding on Christ. If you try to gain your life, you will lose it, but if you lose your life for Christ's sake, you will gain it.

You see, the message of salvation leads to another paradoxical reality for the same message is either a source of condemnation or one of redemption.

There can't be an in-between. So we've seen first that the Sanhedrin trying to gain their lives are losing it and also spreading death.

But the disciples, what are they doing? They're losing their lives for the sake of Christ and life is going out from them. They are being used by God to proclaim the gospel and salvation.

[15 : 52] And now we'll see that that gospel is either condemnation or redemption. So look with me at verse 27. Get a quick drink first. Verse 27 and 28.

And when they, that is the Sanhedrin, brought them, that is the apostles, they set them before the council and the high priest questioned them saying, We strictly charge you not to teach in this name.

Yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Can't even say Jesus. Bring this man's blood upon us.

If you remember, during the passion of Christ, Pilate stood before the Jewish leaders and the Jewish crowds and he said he found no fault in this man.

And they said, Crucify him all the same. And then Pilate, he symbolically, he washed his hands symbolically declaring his innocence of killing Christ. Now, that didn't somehow make him innocent of it but that's what he did in front of the crowd.

[17 : 06] And he said in verse 25 of Matthew chapter 27, His blood, that is Jesus' blood, be on, or this blood is on you and then, sorry, and then the crowd, the Jewish crowd said in response, His blood be on us and on our children.

Then Pilate released for them Barabbas and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified. They have short memories. They said, listen, in verse 27 and 28 of chapter 5 in Acts, You are intent to bring this man's blood upon our heads.

That's, that's, that's not our problem. We're not guilty of this man's death and yet, at the passion, they said, be upon our heads and on our children's heads.

He is guilty if, if he is found not guilty, whatever, we'll deal with it. May his blood, we are the cause of this man going to the cross. And they, they did, they played a huge part in the death of Jesus.

It might have been Roman nails going into his hands and feet, but surely, surely, it was the, the pressure and the desire of Christ's own people that sent him to the cross.

[18 : 19] And really, us as well. But here, the Sanhedrin, they do have blood on their heads. They do have dirty hands in all of this. They are condemned for their sin. So let's continue.

Verse 29. But Peter and the apostles answered, We must obey God rather than men.

The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as leader and savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

And we are witnesses to these things. And so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him. Peter does not mince words.

He gives them the straight truth of the gospel. And he continues his bold preaching by emphasizing three key aspects of the gospel message. The first, this is not a new religion.

[19 : 17] This is the culmination of the biblical message, the reference to our fathers. It's Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is not a new religion that just we conjured up or we follow some guy that twisted the Bible.

This is our faith. The second is that repentance and forgiveness of sins are extended to all of Israel. And this is the wonderful thing about it.

Even to them. I mean, it says right here in verse 30, verse 31, God exalted him at his right hand as leader and savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

Peter is saying, this gospel is so remarkable that it extends to you. You with blood upon your heads, you who have dirty hands, it is for you.

And the third thing that the Holy Spirit who testifies to the resurrection is now given as a gift to all those who live a life of faith. So in short, the salvation that is proclaimed is extended to the very people who killed Christ himself because the grace of God is truly that big.

[20 : 33] The sacrifice of Christ on the cross was that complete. He gives repentance and forgiveness of sins, salvation even to the Sanhedrin.

But what does it mean for the Lord to give repentance? I mean, normally we repent, but what does it mean for God to give repentance? Through Christ, an opportunity to be reconciled is extended that would otherwise be impossible.

That is what it means for God to give repentance. The gift of repentance is an open door for reconciliation. I'll share a story. Hopefully it illuminates it a bit more.

I was 20. I was hurt really bad by someone close to me and I decided that I was done talking to that person. And six months went by and I didn't answer phone calls or I didn't text back using QWERTY on my flip phone.

A little throwback there. I didn't even have a Blackberry at the time. I was not interested at all in reconciliation. I was, I decided that that was it except six months later and I felt convicted that I needed to extend, in a sense, an olive branch for reconciliation.

[21 : 57] Now, I'm not somehow lifting myself up because six months is far too long and there's another part of the story that is inconsequential to this example. But there would be no opportunity for reconciliation if I did not extend an opportunity for repentance.

Whether or not that person took the repentance, okay, it's one thing, but I extended repentance so that there would be a possibility, an open door of reconciliation.

This is precisely what Peter is saying here. The God of our forefathers who raised Christ from the dead, whom he sent to die for your sins, who is seated at the right hand of God the Father has opened the door for repentance so that forgiveness and reconciliation can take place for us to be united to God through Christ so that his very spirit comes to reside in us.

That we because of our sin are alienated from God and there is no amount of things that we can do to get him to notice us or to put him in a situation where he has to forgive us but instead God unilaterally he gives repentance an opportunity for reconciliation.

this is the grace of God at work and that's precisely what Peter is saying. Friends, this is the gospel message. The invitation for repentance and forgiveness if embraced is in a sense to bring this man Jesus, his blood upon your head but not for condemnation any longer but for cleansing for salvation.

[23 : 49] It's interesting how the blood of Christ for those that are choosing by God's spirit to embrace the gospel message it cleanses of sin. It's a beautiful thing but when we try to self-justify and push Christ away that blood becomes condemnation upon us and it testifies to us that we are not forgiven that our sins are not taken away that reconciliation is not ours.

The same message of the gospel is condemnation for those who want to pursue salvation on their own terms that is divorced from a reconciliation with God.

It's a very instructive text for us. There's no middle ground it would seem for the gospel message is either reconciliation or not.

The blood upon our heads are either for cleansing or condemnation. So once again if you try to lose your life if you try to gain your life you will lose it but if you lose your life for Christ's sake you will gain it.

So how do the Jewish leaders respond? Verse 33 When they heard this they were enraged and wanted to kill them.

[25 : 16] Here friends is the first instance of public dishonor and physical persecution in the church and yet we see the apostles not cower but rejoice.

And this brings us to our third and final example about how the gospel is paradoxical for the gospel brings honor through dishonor. Look at verse 34 to 42.

I'm going to jump around a bit here. When they heard this they were enraged and wanted to kill them. But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel a teacher of the law held in honor by all people stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while.

And he said to them and I'm not going to read this section but he sums it up here in verse 38. So in the present case I tell you keep away from these men and let them alone.

For if this plan or this undertaking is of man it will fail but if it is of God you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God.

[26 : 24] We'll continue. So the Sanhedrin took his advice and when they had called in the apostles they beat them and that beating them almost certainly is 40 lashes minus 1.

It wasn't a few slaps around. They flayed their back. They beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go.

Then the apostles left the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. Excuse me. We're going to look a bit more deeply at Gamaliel when we explore St.

Paul's conversion in chapter 9 of Acts. But what is interesting here is that a Pharisee was a voice of reason and moderation. Especially given what we see in the Gospels of this opposition to Christ by the Pharisees.

Gamaliel, he highlights the truth that God's plan has an ultimate and triumphant telos or end that cannot be thwarted. God's plans can't be uprooted.

[27 : 33] They can't be squashed. Even when the evil earthly and cosmic powers coalesced to destroy the Savior, it resulted in the complete opposite. So too with the church.

The church is the body of Christ. So the destiny of Christ the head is the destiny of the church which is Christ's body. So it would be incredibly foolish in a sense to follow after a murdered leader risking life and limb unless that leader was fully man and fully God rising from the grave and ascending into heaven and providing the opportunity for repentance and reconciliation and the promise that it would happen to them as well.

That this Christ who conquered death even if they were to die on the spot by the Sanhedrin, they too would rise again. because Christ rose again to new life, the apostles had the same confidence that even if they lost their mortal lives bearing witness to the gospel, their destiny would be the same as their master.

They are honored to be dishonored. They are honored to be connected to Christ at the cost of being dishonored by man. They are graced to be disgraced.

How is this such a, I mean the paradox, it flies in the face of conventional thinking and yet this is the beauty of the gospel.

[29 : 10] If you try to gain your life, you will lose it. But if you lose your life for Christ's sake, you will gain it. Just to wrap things up, what a paradox. The persecution of the church, it results in the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth.

We'll see that after the stoning of Stephen in Acts chapter 7 and into Acts chapter 8. The second century church father, Tertullian, said the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, which is to say that you can persecute the church as much and as heavy as you want, but it will result in the opposite.

It will spread the gospel far and wide. And friends, this is our hope as well. that to gain our lives, we must lose them. We must lose our lives, our ambitions that go too far, our desires, our ambitious desires that turn into jealousy and envy, because we are bent and broken inside.

And we cannot achieve a salvation that is eternal and forever in the presence of God by our own strong work or good deeds.

So we lose our lives. We die to these selfish ambitions, these self-congratulations and self-condemnations. We die to what seems like wisdom in our world so that in our lives we may live forever united to Christ.

[30 : 46] And friends, to be a blessing to those around us, to be a fragrance around decay, life where there's death. This is the paradox of the gospel and it is good news for us this morning.

Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for the wonderful examples of the apostles. apostles, men, men just like us today, mortal, frail, given to worry and anxiety, fears, times where we are not courageous, and yet by your Holy Spirit, by your power, by the grace that you give, that they were able to do wonderful things.

And Lord, that is our destiny as well, to bear witness to the cross, to not cower, but by your strength to obey. Lord, we pray that we would embrace that wonderful, beautiful, paradoxical gospel.

Lord, that we would be people that lose our life for your sake, trusting that the life that you give us when we lose our life is not just good in the here and now, but eternal and wonderful, full of joy, abounding in glory.

So Lord, we lift these things up to you. We pray that you would help us to obey you, help us to trust in you, help us to feed on this wonderful message. We pray this in Christ's name.

[32 : 29] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen.